

**“HARMONIOUS DISAGREEMENT”: PAINTERS ELEVEN, ABSTRACTION,
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CANADIAN MODERNISM IN THE 1950S**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is an examination of Painters Eleven and the complex network of national and international discourses on modern art, abstraction, and cultural politics that converged in Toronto in the 1950s. As a practical grouping of artists, Painters Eleven relied on self-marketing and self-branding strategies to gain recognition for themselves as well as for modern art in general in English Canada. Through a close consideration of Painters Eleven’s paradoxical idea of “harmonious disagreement,” I explore the group’s artistic practices, exhibition practices and pursuits, public and private statements, and their career successes and failures in order to highlight the idiosyncratic and contradictory mechanics of the group. I argue that the tensions between rhetoric and practice, cohesion and incohesion, and amicability and antagonism in the group’s art and discourse form a complex series of conflicts—as well as attempts to overcome or smooth out these conflicts or frictions—which are at the crux of Painters Eleven’s significance for abstract painting in midcentury English Canada. This study reframes the relationship between Painters Eleven and their reputations as pioneers of midcentury Canadian modernism by investigating how the group conceptualized, curated, and constructed their own reputations as avant-garde radicals. It also considers what their discourse and practice in Toronto can reveal about a transnational network of experimental abstraction in the era following the end of the Second World War, where contemporaneous artistic and critical activities in centers like Montreal, New York, and Paris were similarly preoccupied with advancing modern art as a national or international cultural force. I seek to understand how Painters Eleven attempted to mediate and reconcile the universalizing convictions of modernism and progress in art, science, and technology with the increasingly urgent

concern for national identity in Canada during this period. By examining Painters Eleven through the lens of a postwar cosmopolitan ethos and vision, this inquiry offers new insight into their significance for the construction of Canadian culture in the postwar era.

Lay Summary

The goal of this study is to understand why Painters Eleven, a group of eleven artists that formed in Toronto in the 1950s, are significant to the history of art in Canada. In existing scholarship, Painters Eleven tend to be dismissed because their paintings did not make a radical, long-term, international impact on the art world. My dissertation refutes this perspective by arguing that Painters Eleven's artwork, ideas, and activities reflect their critical awareness of major developments in abstract painting that were happening on an international level. By revealing how Painters Eleven attempted to insert themselves into these contemporary dialogues, I make the argument that the group is crucial to understanding how artists in Canada conceived of modern and abstract art. I also examine how Painters Eleven's art and ideas responded to larger concerns about cultural nationalism and internationalism in the period after the Second World War.

Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work based on my own library and archival research. Initial consultation of MG30, D404, Harold Town fonds at the Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, was carried out by Jaleen Grove in September 2014, and her notes and photographs were shared with me with the permission of the Estate of Harold Town. I conducted my own consultation of these same fonds in January 2015, guided by Jaleen Grove's notes. The research cited in this dissertation is a result of my own investigation of these fonds and the ideas and analysis presented in relation to these archives are completely my own.

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List of Abbreviations

AAA	American Abstract Artists
AGT	Art Gallery of Toronto
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CGP	Canadian Group of Painters
CNE	Canadian National Exhibition
CSGA	Canadian Society of Graphic Artists
CSPWC	Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour
ICA	Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
NGC	National Gallery of Canada
NORAD	North American Air Defense Command
OSA	Ontario Society of Artists
RCA	Royal Canadian Academy of Arts
ROM	Royal Ontario Museum
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Chapter One: Introduction

Publicized as “an unusual exhibition of paintings,” the inaugural showcase of a group of artists calling themselves Painters Eleven opened on the evening of February 12, 1954 at the Roberts Gallery in Toronto. Drawing record crowds to the gallery, the self-titled *Painters 11* show offered its visitors an uncommon spectacle. It was one of the few exhibitions in Toronto to date to feature exclusively abstract and non-figurative works of art, marked by their distortion or outright rejection of real-world phenomena, produced by contemporary Canadian artists. Conceived as a means by which to confront a predominantly conservative public with “new forms of imagery,”¹ the exhibition included *The Cloister* (1953) by Alexandra Luke [Fig. 1], *Candy Tree* (1952–53) by Oscar Cahén [Fig. 2], and *Tumult for a King* (1954) by Harold Town [Fig. 3]. In their refusal of representational or recognizable subject matter, the paintings on display at the Roberts Gallery were part of a “radical,” “experimental,” and “modern” art trend developing in Toronto in the late 1940s and early 1950s.² One art critic for the *Toronto Daily Star* reported on the show’s groundbreaking intervention in the art scene—albeit with a

¹ Walter Abell, “East is West—Thoughts on the Unity and Meaning of Contemporary Art,” *Canadian Art* 11:2 (Winter 1954): 44.

² Newspapers, magazines, and other print media often referred to abstract paintings as “radical” or “experimental” art. See for example Pearl McCarthy, “Ontario Society of Artists Encourages New Experiments,” *Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1945, p. 3; McCarthy, “Society’s Exhibit Had Lay Appeal, Arouses Criticism,” *Globe and Mail*, March 4, 1949, p. 25; and Wessley Hicks, “Modernistic art fine for those who like it,” *Toronto Telegram*, March 1951, n.p.

reserved courtesy befitting Toronto's culturally prim environment, stating: "[the exhibition]...blazes independent trails" and "gives conservatism a polite but firm kick in the pants."³

Painters Eleven was a self-organized collective of abstract artists in Toronto. They have been considered to be among the pioneers of modernism in English-Canadian painting, and the successive counterpart to the Montreal Automatistes' artistic and social revolution in French Canada in the 1940s.⁴ The group comprised eleven members: Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Hortense Gordon, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, Jock Macdonald, Ray Mead, Kazuo Nakamura, William Ronald, Harold Town, and Walter Yarwood. Formed in 1953 and active until their disbandment in 1960, the immediate purpose of Painters Eleven was purely practical. They aimed to circumvent the exhibitionary practices of local art academies, which they believed discriminated against abstract painting. To counteract this unjust marginalization, Painters Eleven grouped together as a collective, breaking away from established arts societies such as the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA), which had controlled Toronto's art scene since their founding in 1872 and 1880 respectively. With their traditional standards and authority, societies like the OSA and the RCA maintained an

³ Hugh Thomson, "Painters Eleven Show Modern Art," *Toronto Daily Star*, February 13, 1954, n.p.

⁴ See Joan Murray, *Origins of Abstraction in Canada: Modernist Pioneers* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1994). See also Joan Murray, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1979); Denise Leclerc, *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992); and Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007).

artistic conservatism throughout Toronto and among its public by favoring traditional figurative and landscape painting styles over “modern,” or “experimental,” approaches.⁵ Societies were also exclusive institutions that required nominations and elections for membership, and also employed a jury selection system for their annual exhibitions. Painters Eleven, in declaring an autonomy from these restrictive establishments, sought a new model for exhibitions. They pursued the freedom of self-curation—to operate as an independent group by organizing and arranging their own shows. This quest for self-curation was perhaps more radical than the abstract content of their paintings themselves. Commercial and independent galleries were rare, and Painters Eleven were only able to secure their inaugural show because Jack Bush was already a represented artist at the Roberts Gallery. While Toronto had been previously exposed to a handful of “all-abstract” exhibitions—or shows which exclusively featured abstract paintings, typically assembled and financed by a gallery owner—it was nearly unheard of for an autonomous group of artists to conduct their activities outside of the dominant system of arts societies in Toronto.⁶

⁵ The dominant influence of arts societies in Toronto is chronicled in Robert McKaskell, “Changing Academies: The Rise of Abstraction in Canadian Painting,” in *Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s*, by Robert McKaskell, Sandra Paikowsky, Virginia Wright, and Allan Collier (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 16–36. See also Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts Before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁶ McKaskell.

The eleven abstract artists who formed Painters Eleven in 1953 anticipated that they would have greater success in securing exhibition opportunities in Toronto by promoting themselves as a collective rather than as solo painters. As a practical initiative, Painters Eleven was not driven by strong artistic partnerships or personal relationships. At their first congregation in 1953, many of the eleven were strangers to each other—in one case, members Tom Hodgson and Alexandra Luke only knew of one another’s existence because they had seen their artwork at previous exhibitions. Of the eleven artists who were not strangers, only a handful were already acquainted, and fewer still could be counted as friends. Even as their group coalition developed into the mid-1950s, their personal bonds failed to form deep roots, and many of the artists remained distant from each other. This strangely incohesive and idiosyncratic assemblage defined Painters Eleven’s internal dynamics, often leading to clashes in personality and heated arguments at the sporadically held group meetings. Member Harold Town later confirmed that Painters Eleven was a fundamentally professional, even financially-motivated venture, when he described it as “nothing more than a mechanism for showing pictures economically.”⁷ Effectively, as Town confirms, the grouping acted as an administrative “mechanism,” and relied on tactics of self-marketing and self-branding as strategies by which to gain recognition not only for themselves as individuals, but also for modern art in general in Toronto. In their mission to combat artistic conservatism, Painters Eleven also had a broader, more ambitious agenda—to contribute to the changing tide against

⁷ Harold Town, “Rough drafts of P11 beginnings,” n.d., unpublished essay, MG30 D404, Volume 32, File 4, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

parochial thinking not just in Toronto, but also in the overall cultural environment of English Canada, through public and critical exposure to modern painting.⁸

The seeming incompatibility between Painters Eleven's united front as a self-promotional vanguard for abstract painting and their inconsistent, dispassionate internal relationships is the most puzzling and paradoxical aspect of the group. How do the contradictions within Painters Eleven's practical operations and artistic motivations make sense within Toronto's art scene and discourse in the 1950s? In what way, if any, can these contradictions be resolved? Instead of viewing this set of conflicts as an obstacle that prevents or closes off significant study of Painters Eleven, I suggest that it opens up a new and fruitful avenue for critical exploration. From my perspective, the tensions between rhetoric and practice, cohesion and incohesion, and amicability and antagonism that are present in Painters Eleven's art and discourse form part of a complex series of frictions—as well as attempts to overcome or smooth out these frictions—which are at the crux of Painters Eleven's art historical significance. Despite being a pragmatic,

⁸ In using the designation “English Canada” I recognize that the dilemma of national identity in Canada at midcentury was marked by a distinction between English-speaking and French-speaking territories, regions, histories, politics, and culture. References to “English Canada” are an acknowledgement of the linguistic, political, and cultural specificities of Toronto's position within an English-speaking, and even an Ontario-oriented, historical position. For more on English Canada, see Philip Resnick, *Thinking English Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, 1994); Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); and José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

economic “mechanism” for the exhibition of their abstract paintings, Painters Eleven relied upon a compelling publicity campaign through which to establish not only their aesthetic solidarity but also their investment in Canadian cultural identity and artistic modernism. The self-constructed nature of their group identity was rooted in the necessity for a self-conceptualized, recognizable brand, regardless of their internal contradictions. Overall, it was the *illusion* and outward projection of togetherness, and not a true unity, that allowed Painters Eleven to craft together a position for themselves as Toronto’s avant-garde modernists.

It should be noted here that, as a result of Painters Eleven’s social heterogeneity and lack of personal cohesion, addressing all eleven artists at once is nearly impossible. Previous research has therefore tended to skew towards prioritizing individual artists who have gained the most recognition both domestically and internationally since the 1950s, which includes Jack Bush, Harold Town, Jock Macdonald, and William Ronald. As a result, the volume of critical attention given to its lesser-known members has been inadequate. With the intention of counterbalancing the common exclusion of these individuals—in particular Hortense Gordon, Alexandra Luke, Kazuo Nakamura, and Tom Hodgson—I am opting to grant more meaningful and extensive consideration of these members by highlighting their works where possible, in order to uncover their importance to a critical discussion of Painters Eleven. For example, one of the most overlooked Painters Eleven member is Hortense Gordon. Gordon’s reputation as a likeable elderly woman, together with the presumption that her paintings lack the same aesthetic sophistication and rigor as her associates, has relegated her to the farthest margins of Painters Eleven scholarship. A close analysis of Hortense Gordon, however,

demonstrates that she had a keen grasp on the major theoretical principles behind abstraction as well as how these modernist philosophies could explain the shifting cultural and social grounds around her. In my analysis, Gordon is demonstrated to be indispensable to understanding how Painters Eleven negotiated the idea of universality and cosmopolitanism through formal concerns with pictorial space and composition.

Rather than concede that Painters Eleven's contradictory positions make the group undeserving of critical scrutiny, I contend that the very nature of Painters Eleven's internal incongruities is the source of their critical value. Painters Eleven, I argue, are important because of what their complex historical condition can reveal about how discourses of artistic modernism were received, negotiated, and articulated by artists at mid-century, and on an international scale. The group complicates the existing narrative of abstraction and the avant-garde in the postwar era by way of offering a mediating bridge between the shadow of provincialism and the promise of cosmopolitanism. By taking up Painters Eleven as subject of art historical inquiry, this study offers a re-evaluation of postwar artist groups, ideologies, and operations through the lens of discursive, theoretical, and practical self-fashioning, and in doing so, positions Canadian artistic modernism within a transnational framework. This dissertation investigates the entangled ways that art and discourse intersect and are realized in artists' activities, articulations, statements, attitudes, outlooks and beliefs.

Painters Eleven's abstractions were exemplary of a "modernistic trend" in painting that had been developing in Toronto since the mid-1940s. During this period, the emergence of modern painting had not so much shocked or startled the conservatively-minded artists, critics, and general public in Toronto as it had antagonized their academic

sensibilities.⁹ In the years following the end of the Second World War, the terms “modern art” and “modernistic art” referred not only to the formal innovations of non-figuration introduced in the early-twentieth-century by European art movements such as Fauvism and Cubism,¹⁰ but also to any contemporary international practice that experimented with abstract forms, such as Montreal Automatism and New York Abstract Expressionism. The modern style of Painters Eleven ruffled the traditional, “stuffy” Toronto milieu because it departed from the landscape conventions associated with the Group of Seven, whose images of the “Great White North” from the 1920s and 1930s had achieved mythical status as symbols of Canadian artistic nationalism by midcentury.¹¹ At the time of Painters Eleven’s genesis, cultural identity in Canada was affixed to the Group of Seven’s geographic and regional subject matter as an artistic part of the national heritage of “wilderness,” or what John O’Brian has termed “wildercentrism.”¹² In its refusal to depict any recognizable forms or real-world phenomena, abstraction—also known as

⁹ This has been previously argued by Dennis Reid and Ihor Holubizky. See Barrie Hale and Dennis Reid, *Toronto Painting: 1953–1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Ottawa, 1972); and Ihor Holubizky and Robert McKaskell, *1953* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2003).

¹⁰ Leah Dickerman, *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (The Museum of Modern Art: New York, 2013).

¹¹ See Donald Buchanan, *The Growth of Canadian Painting* (London and Toronto: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., 1950). See also Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art For a Nation* (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada and McClelland & Stewart: 1995); and John O’Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).

¹² John O’Brian, “Wild Art History,” 21–37.

non-representation or non-figuration—was a threat to the “imagined community” of Canadian nationhood that relied heavily on the visualized presence of land, territory, and its inhabitants.¹³ To the displeasure of Toronto conservatives, abstraction was becoming increasingly common. Beginning in 1945, for example, the OSA accepted enough abstract works to dedicate an entire room to “experimental art” in their annual showcases at the Art Gallery of Toronto (AGT), and that same year the T. Eaton Fine Art Galleries spearheaded one of the first “all-abstract” exhibitions in Toronto, called *Excursions in Abstract*.¹⁴ Concerns over the status and future of Canada’s artistic identity grew ever urgent, and a back and forth between pro-modern and anti-modern camps began to take shape in the public arena.

This period of controversy is often referred to in Canadian art history as the “crisis of abstraction”—a term first used by Denise LeClerc to describe a nearly two-decade period from the early 1940s to around 1960, characterized by a highly publicized and hotly argued debate over the validity of abstract painting.¹⁵ The conflict took place predominantly in print media, where editorials in newspapers such as *The Globe and*

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006). See also O’Brian and White, *Beyond Wilderness*; and Marilyn J. McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500–1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ See Pearl McCarthy, “Ontario Society of Artists Encourages New Experiments,” *Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1945, p. 3; Paul Duval, “Art in the Department Store” *Canadian Art* 2:3 (March 1945): 126–128.

¹⁵ See Leclerc, *The Crisis of Abstraction*. See also Murray, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect*, 6.

Mail and Toronto Telegram, and in the nationally-circulating magazine *Canadian Art*, advocated for or against modern art. Opinions could be hostile. Pro-modern supporters accused Group of Seven style paintings to be “stagnating” and “rotting” Canadian art with “aesthetic parochialism,” while the anti-modern camp condemned abstraction as “grotesque” and “hideous,” and “meaningless doodling.”¹⁶ Additionally, allegations of prejudice and discrimination were leveled on both sides. Those in support of non-figuration argued that art societies and conservatively-biased selection juries were censoring modern art. Those against abstract painting claimed the opposite, insisting that it was they, the academic painters, who were the victims of oppression by a new regime of modern painters. From the anti-modern perspective, the “modernistic invasion” was squeezing out the figurative tradition by marginalizing academic artists and giving preference to abstraction.¹⁷ The “crisis of abstraction” reached a tipping point in 1951 when four prominent members of the OSA publicly resigned in protest against the growing influx of modern art, and the story was splashed across the pages of *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Telegram*.¹⁸

¹⁶ For examples of pro-modern opinions, see Paul Duval, “Growing Recognition of Art’s Place in Society Evidenced by Large Cash Awards in Ontario,” *Saturday Night*, March 20, 1948, pp. 2–3; Barker Fairley, “What is Wrong with Canadian Art?” *Canadian Art* 6:1 (Autumn 1948): 24–29; and Andrew Bell, “Yes, Painting Might Be Better in Toronto,” *Canadian Art* 8:1 (Autumn 1950): 28–29. For anti-modern examples, see “Hideous, Sinister, he says,” *Globe and Mail*, n.d., 1951, n.p.; Rose Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here Or Is It Doodling Phase?” *Toronto Telegram*, March 9, 1951, n.p.

¹⁷ “Hideous, Sinister, he says,” n.p.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; and Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?,” n.p.

Painters Eleven surfaced during the prime years of this “crisis” in Toronto. The oppositional forces embedded within this artistic controversy echoed the tensions between tradition and progress in the city as a whole. In the 1950s, Toronto was the fastest-growing city in Canada, undergoing major economic, demographic, and civic changes that would transform it from conservative “Toronto the Good”—a provincial city ruled by a stifling Victorian Protestantism—into a diverse metropolitan “boom-town” by the 1960s.¹⁹ Alongside the growth of automotive, financial, television, and advertising and publishing industries during this era of economic prosperity, Toronto received an influx of postwar European immigrants who diversified the city’s culture. Toronto was also expanding and developing, both physically and technologically. In 1953, the city federated with twelve surrounding municipalities to become Metropolitan Toronto, and in 1954 the opening of the Yonge St. Line marked the completion of Canada’s first subway. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) launched its first broadcast television programming in Toronto, as well as in Montreal, in 1952. While industry, media, and infrastructure were changing dramatically, however, Toronto’s traditional intellectual and social mentalities were slower to adjust. Painters Eleven members Harold Town and William Ronald have commented on the challenges of painting in “Toronto the Good” in

¹⁹ “Toronto the Good” was a motto for the city coined by mayor William Howland in 1880s. See also Leslie McFarlane, “Toronto Boom Town,” 10 min, National Film Board of Canada, 1951, https://www.nfb.ca/film/toronto_boom_town/ (accessed November 22, 2013); and Robert Fulford, “Artists in Boom-Town: Young Painters of Toronto,” *Canadian Art* 14:2 (Winter 1957): 68–70. For a study of the cultural condition of Toronto at mid-century, see Sarah Stanners, “Going British and Being Modern in the Visual Art Systems of Canada, 1906–76,” PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009.

the early 1950s, when the city was still dominated by a “smug, insular mediocrity” of stuffy uptightness, where movies, sporting events, and serving alcohol were prohibited on Sundays.²⁰ With sixty-nine percent of Torontonians being of British ancestry in 1951, the culture was found by many to be “a stoic bastion” of “Victorian morality” and “British Dullness.”²¹ The English writer and artist Wyndham Lewis, co-founder of the Vorticist movement and co-editor of the literary magazine *BLAST*, founded in 1914, who lived in Toronto for a number of years during the Second World War, described the place as a “sanctimonious icebox.”²²

Furthermore, the deluge of “progress” in the forms of mass media advertising and television had generated a storm of debate, another “crisis” over the potentially stupefying effects of modern technology and mass-consumerism in English Canada.²³ As historians L.B. Kuffert, Phillip Massolin, and Damien-Claude Bélanger have all argued, modernization in this form of industrial and technological advancement towards mass culture was threatening the humanities and intellectual rigor in education, high cultural

²⁰ Barrie Hale, *Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950–1981*, Provincial Essays Vol. 2 (Toronto, Ont.: Phacops Pub. Society at the Coach House Press, 1985), 9.

²¹ Allan Levine, *Toronto: Biography of a City* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 2014). Morley Callaghan uses the phrase “British Dullness” in his essay, “My Tiger City,” first published in *New World* (February 1947) and republished in part in William Kilbourn, *The Toronto Book* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), 199.

²² Cited in Kilbourn, *The Toronto Book*, 148.

²³ L.B. Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939–1967* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003).

standards, and religion and morality.²⁴ Critics of modernity, according to Massolin, “rallied against a society whose values they perceived to be in crisis” as they advocated for “cultural moralism and social meliorism.”²⁵ In the decade following the end of the Second World War, modernity and technology became increasingly associated with American culture. The penetration of advertising and television programs from the United States—a country blighted with consumerism, materialism, and mass media-induced vapidness, so it was claimed—into Canadian societies was seen by many as jeopardizing a wholesome Canadian way of life, just as abstract painting, in its rejection of landscape, was seen as a “crisis” of cultural identity in Canada, a threat to the “imagined community” of Canadian nationhood.²⁶ The fear of American “cultural imperialism” was compounded by an alarming increase in economic and military ties with the United States after the war, which appeared to be leading to a loss of autonomy and sovereignty in Canadian policy.²⁷ One such early critic included Marshall McLuhan

²⁴ See *ibid.*; Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939–1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); and Damien-Claude Bélanger, *Prejudice and Pride: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

²⁵ Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals*, 9.

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

²⁷ A number of events triggered these fears of economic and military imperialism, including Canada’s “piggy-backing” onto the Marshall Plan for European recovery, the integration of the defense systems of Canada and the United States through NORAD, and the mobilization of Canadian troops by American forces in Korea without the consultation of Prime Minister Lester Pearson. See Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals*; Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: James Lorimer and

who, as a professor of English at the University of Toronto, began a series of projects and seminars that investigated the role of media and communication in the structuring of human perceptions and interactions. Most notable of his publications during this period is *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), in which McLuhan presented a highly moralistic appraisal of technology, commenting on advertising's homogenization of society, its decreasing of intellectual culture, and the corruption of western values.²⁸ Although McLuhan would later abandon his moralistic condemnations of mass media, *The Mechanical Bride* reveals the tensions between tradition and progress which were shaping public discourse in Toronto in the early 1950s.

The debate over abstraction, then, can be contextualized within a larger conversation about “progress” in the field of cultural production in Toronto and English Canada, where “progress” was not only aligned with the “modern” as an opposition to the traditional, but also with shifting ideological configurations of “national culture.”²⁹ As Jody Berland has argued, Canadian cultural discourse in midcentury was structured around a duality of two “isms”—nationalism and modernism. According to Berland, these two “isms” constituted “the dominant frameworks in which artists, intellectuals, and administrators grappled with changing relationships between culture, space, time,

Company, 2003); and Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

²⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951).

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

and identity” in the twentieth century.³⁰ For many artists, including Painters Eleven, “progress” and “modernism” were not only understood as an aesthetic rupturing of tradition through the visual rhetoric of non-figuration, but were also forces that liberated art from the burden of nationalistic expression. By the 1950s, modern-leaning critics were frustrated with narrow geographic and regional definitions of “Canadianness” in art. Artist Graham Coughtry famously quipped, “every damn tree in the country has been painted” in *Canadian Art* magazine in 1948, and in 1952 William Ronald declared that Canada was reaching “a turning point” towards “a broader language in all fields.”³¹ Modernism and its associated ideological principles—formal autonomy, innovation, and universal purity—opened the aesthetic and spatial parameters of Canadian art onto this “broader language” of “universal concepts” beyond the limitations of the national.³² For those in the world of painting, being modern meant an embracing of internationally-oriented themes and especially scientific and technological advancements which were

³⁰ Jody Berland, “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis,” in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), 25–26. See also Paul Litt, “The Massey Commission, Americanization, and Canadian Cultural Nationalism,” *Queen’s Quarterly* (Summer 1991): 357–87.

³¹ Graham Coughtry, quoted in David Burnett, *Toronto Painting of the 1960’s* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 10; and Correspondence from William Ronald to the Canada Foundation for Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, 28 October 1952, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

³² On the ideology and rhetoric of “purity” in abstract painting, see Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

transforming the global society. The 1940s and 1950s, for example, gave birth to both the “Atomic Age” and the “Space Age,” a cultural period marked by the development of the atomic bomb and the invention of the V-2 Rocket, which launched an era of human space exploration. Science and progress were aligned with a contemporary modern spirit as an expression of the future and a new era of expanded, “universal” human consciousness unbounded from earthly geopolitics. Painters Eleven were keen to embrace this new ethos of progress—Ronald, for example insisted that “the 20th century is going through a time of terrific speed, and the painters are keeping up-to-date with the times.”³³

As Berland points out, the “formative coalition” between nationalism and modernism signaled a convergence of ideas between artistic producers and cultural administrators in English Canada.³⁴ The document that encapsulates this critical historical juncture and the nationalization of culture in Canada is the *Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences*, an official inquiry into the state of the artistic and intellectual environment in Canada, led by diplomat Vincent Massey from 1949–51 and colloquially known as the Massey Report.³⁵ The Report campaigned for increased federal funding of the arts in Canada and the exportation of its artistic and intellectual products in order to cultivate a national high culture to counteract the vapid

³³ Ronald, quoted in “Abstract Art Show Will Be Intriguing,” *The Daily Times-Gazette* (Oshawa-Whitby), October 17, 1952, n.p.

³⁴ Berland, “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy,” 17.

³⁵ Canada. *Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951).

imports of American mass media, and to then “project” this elevated culture “abroad.”³⁶ Like artists Coughtry and Ronald, Massey insisted that the key to cultural progress in Canada was not in geographic nationalisms but rather in abstract painting and its international, if not its “universal,” character. “Modern painting,” the Report reads, “can no longer exploit the novelty of the Canadian landscape...Our young painters are being judged on exactly the same footing as the abstract painters of other countries.”³⁷ In other words, Massey believed that art in Canada depended on its participation within an international sphere of painting in *competition* with those being produced in other countries. Berland argues that the Massey Report “placed modernist art discourse at the centre of the country’s new official culture,” and that, “nationalist in rhetoric but internationalist in its proposed aesthetic strategies,” the Report’s idea of progress aligned with a growing cosmopolitan outlook on cultural identity in Canada.³⁸ This cosmopolitanism may be characterized as a worldview that links national and international cultural preoccupations together as a set of “interpenetrating principles” by situating local cultural affiliations within the context of a universal whole.³⁹ In Toronto, Painters Eleven’s cosmopolitan leanings manifested in the belief that the transcendent visual language of abstract painting could elevate art and culture in Canada to be “up-to-

³⁶ On the relationship between Vincent Massey and culture, see Karen Finlay, *The Force of Culture: Vincent Massey and Canadian Sovereignty* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); and Tippett, *Making Culture*.

³⁷ “The Royal Commission—Excerpts from the Report,” *Canadian Art* 8:4 (Summer 1951): 177. Also quoted in Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada*, 92.

³⁸ Berland, “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy,” 20.

³⁹ Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006).

date” with global developments and international experiments in abstraction at midcentury.⁴⁰

In grappling with these evolving relationships between nationalism and modernism, Painters Eleven joined a transnational preoccupation with abstract painting as a means of coping with the geopolitical turmoil and uncertainty that emerged after the end of the Second World War. In a new world order, where European countries like France and Italy found themselves wounded and recovering from the economic, social, and political aftershocks of the war while the United States flourished in a boom of postwar prosperity and political power, major nations attempted to recuperate, or even create anew, the “cultural forms of modernism that had been allied with national strength.”⁴¹ In this “reconstruction of modernism,” as Serge Guilbaut has called it, the Parisian art scene in particular struggled to reestablish its intellectual and artistic prestige as a show of fortitude. Caught between a desire to restore their prewar glory by reviving the early-twentieth-century legacies of modern masters like Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, and a competing belief in the necessity for new art and “adventure,”⁴² the Parisian art scene was, like Canada, entangled in what Natalie Adamson calls a “dialectical conflict” of national and cosmopolitanism. In her comprehensive book, which examines the medley of abstract styles that formed in Paris during the time, including *art*

⁴⁰ Ronald, quoted in “Abstract Art Show Will Be Intriguing,” n.p.

⁴¹ See Serge Guilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945–1964* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), xii.

⁴² See Michel Tapié, “An Other Art,” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* 2nd ed., eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz (University of California Press, 2012), 43–44.

informel, *art autre*, and *tachisme*, Adamson asserts that this conflict spoke “simultaneously to national tradition and to a diverse, universalised concept of artistic identity” in postwar France.⁴³

Meanwhile, the United States was thrown into the international spotlight with the emergence of New York Abstract Expressionism. In New York in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Abstract Expressionism was also a contested field of art production in the battle between conservative institutions and abstract artists in the United States. One such battle manifested in a debate over the “Irascible 18.” In 1951, a group of eighteen abstract painters which included Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and others who were associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement, signed an open letter to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this letter, the artists—who would be labelled the “Irascible 18” or simply “The Irascibles”—protested the Metropolitan Museum’s conservative bias, calling for the institution to end its “contempt” and “notorious hostility to advanced art.”⁴⁴ The move reverberated into nearby metropolitan centers like Boston and Chicago, where debates over “modern art” or “contemporary art” fueled print media articles and editorials.⁴⁵ In the United States, the issue carried severe political undertones, as it echoed pressing concerns over Communism and leftist leanings during a period where Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-Communist witch-hunt had reached a fever pitch.

⁴³ Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944–1964* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 7–8.

⁴⁴ “Open Letter to Roland L. Redmond, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” May 20, 1950.

⁴⁵ See Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013).

Accompanied by the outbreak of the Cold War, Abstract Expressionism came to be inscribed with nationalistic agendas, ideologies, and identity. As Eva Cockcroft and Serge Guilbaut have independently noted, in the 1950s the liberated gestural brushwork of Abstract Expressionism—epitomized in the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock—were seen to stand in for American democracy, individuality, and freedom of expression in opposition to the oppression and conformity of Soviet Communism.⁴⁶ Abstract Expressionism came to be a tool in international cultural diplomacy.

Closer to Toronto, the Montreal Automatistes had set an avant-garde precedent for Canada with the publication of the *Refus global* manifesto in August 1948.⁴⁷ Led by Paul-Émile Borduas, the Automatistes boycotted the conservative bias of the jury of the Musée des Beaux-arts earlier that same year, and had subsequently been nicknamed Les Rebelles (the Rebels). *Refus global*, or *Total Refusal*, called for the social and artistic liberation from Quebec's conservative Catholic government. Foreshadowing the intense

⁴⁶ See Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* (June 1974): 39–41; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism and the Cultural Logic of Romantic Anti-Capitalism: Dissent during the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Megan M. Fontanella, "A Vital Force: Abstract Art and Cultural Politics at Mid-Century," in *Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949–1960*, by Megan M. Fontanella, Flavia Frigeri, Tracey Bashkoff, and Joan Marter (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2012), 49–58.

⁴⁷ Paul-Émile Borduas, *Total Refusal: The Complete 1958 Manifesto of the Montreal Automatistes*, trans. Ray Ellenwood (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1985), 37–41.

political and cultural upheaval of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, where the secularization of Quebec's government ushered in a new era of reform, including in the education and economic sectors, the *Refus global* manifesto lashed out against state and institutional authority and the repression of culture and knowledge. The text was replete with inflammatory rhetoric that glorified and reproduced the avant-garde themes of political and artistic rebellion. As François-Marc Gagnon has noted, Montreal artists in the 1940s still considered Paris to be the center of the modern art world, having come to such conclusions after a string of unimpressive, albeit uninformed and poorly timed, visits to New York, where Borduas and others missed crucial Abstract Expressionist shows.⁴⁸ Inspired by the return of Alfred Pellon to Montreal from Paris in 1940, the Automatistes were interested in a transatlantic connection by constructing a French lineage rooted in the Surrealist tradition.⁴⁹

The regional gap in culture at this time between Toronto “the Good,” with its stuffy “British dullness,” and Montreal, allied with French cultural sophistication, is clear in the different approaches to “avant-gardism” that emerged in each city. Although both Painters Eleven and the Automatistes demanded modernism in the form of a rupture from suppressive academic institutions and traditionalism, the Automatistes were bursting with

⁴⁸ François-Marc Gagnon, “New York as Seen from Montreal,” in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945–1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 130–143.

⁴⁹ See Sandra Paikowsky, “Vivre dans la cité: Quebec Abstract Painting,” in *Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s*, by Robert McKaskell, Sandra Paikowsky, Virginia Wright, and Allan Collier (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 39–58; and LeClerc, *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada*.

political fervency and blasphemous language in their manifesto—*Refus global* damned Catholicism “to Hell” and called for revolution, passion, and savagery—while Painters Eleven opted for a polite and unexciting suggestion for resolution between pro-abstract and anti-abstract camps in Toronto.⁵⁰ Rather than make demands for complete rebellion or *Total Refusal*, Painters Eleven could not help but be faithful to their Torontonians propriety in the statement published in their inaugural exhibition pamphlet for the Roberts Gallery in 1954. In this pamphlet, Painters Eleven declared: “This exhibition is not a compact to agree, but rather the expression of a long repressed desire on the part of eleven painters to disagree harmoniously in terms visually indigenous to this age.”⁵¹ Woven into this ceremonious wording was not just a branding of their group as a unit of “repressed” abstract artists, but also an offer to “disagree” with conservatives with “harmonious” civility—no hostility and no passion required. The following year, a second exhibition at the Roberts Gallery maintained their courteous position of “harmonious disagreement,” and in fact, claimed that theirs was “no manifesto here for the times” at all.⁵² Even in their desperation for aesthetic liberation, the language of the English-Canadian artists fizzles in comparison to their French-Canadian contemporaries, a symptom of “British dullness.”

It is peculiar that Painters Eleven, with its long-lasting reputation in the canon of art history in Canada as modernist trailblazers, are characterized by such a dispassionate union. However, it would be an oversight to dismiss Painters Eleven and the “crisis of

⁵⁰ Borduas, *Total Refusal*, 37–41.

⁵¹ *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1954), n.p.

⁵² *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1955), n.p.

abstraction” in Toronto as a “quaint conflict” of Canadian provincialism as Barrie Hale does in his essay *Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950–1981* (1985), simply because of this attribute.⁵³ Scholars such as Hale have downplayed the significance of the debates over modern art and nationalism that took place in Toronto in the 1940s and 1950s within a larger, international scope of artistic debate in the postwar era. This has been one of the critical oversights in existing literature on the topic. Scholarship has had a tendency to ignore the fact that similar controversies and concerns over art and nationhood were being fought on a transnational scale, infecting major cultural and artistic centers like New York and Paris. By situating Painters Eleven within the broader postwar context of a global political, cultural, and social upheaval, I argue that Canada’s internal struggle between the competing forces of nationalism and internationalism is a crucial part of a transnational network of locations, artists, critics, and publics, all attempting to define and understand abstraction in the mid-twentieth-century.

Furthermore, I venture that in spite of the reserved and polite nature of some of their promotional material, in much of their private writings Painters Eleven had a surprising propensity for vigorous and even aggressive language, often framed in the lofty and idealized notions of solidarity and harmony, progress and autonomy, and elevation and universality. These ideas suggests that, when crafting their own identity as Toronto’s avant-garde “rebels,”⁵⁴ Painters Eleven were articulating an internalized set of modernist ideologies and dialogues which were also being explored in contemporary

⁵³ Hale, *Out of the Park*, 14.

⁵⁴ “Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan,” *Time Canada* 67:19 (May 7, 1956): 38.

debates in French Canada, England, the United States, and France. In both their public and private texts, Painters Eleven often articulated a three-fold interest—to act as a united front in the face of marginalization in Toronto, to delineate the formal principles of aesthetic signification that legitimized abstraction, and to elevate Canada’s artistic identity and cultural taste towards the international. I contend that Painters Eleven folded themselves into a transnational network of debates about abstract art, both national and international, and staked a claim for themselves as the avant-garde of midcentury modernism in English Canada.

As an investigation of Painters Eleven as part of an interconnected dialogue, this project can be seen as an extension of the art historical considerations undertaken in Joan Marter’s critical anthology, *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context* (2007).⁵⁵ Marter’s anthology examines the broader context of Abstract Expressionism by situating the reception of the American style within the political and cultural perspectives of contemporaneous artists in Latin America, the Soviet Union, Italy, and Japan. The texts decentralize Abstract Expressionism by reframing the movement as part of an international “ascendency” of postwar abstract painting. Like Marter, I seek a recontextualization of midcentury modernism that opens up the discourse “beyond the previously identified roster of participants and ideas.”⁵⁶ Unlike Marter, however, I do not foreground Abstract Expressionism as the primary prism through which to view and build upon this discursive expansion. Rather, I argue that Painters Eleven reveals a nexus of

⁵⁵ Joan Marter, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context* (Rutgers University Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1–3.

dialogues among a number of American, European, and British ideas, suspended together both in Painters Eleven's visual practices and their aesthetic philosophies. No single figure, theory, or school is prioritized in my inquiry. Painters Eleven's abstractions are instead understood as intertextual—a layered and textured relation of meanings which exist and move within a “network of textual relations.”⁵⁷ I explore how a nebulous set of exposures to the ideas of major international artists and art-critical writers like Hans Hofmann, Graham Sutherland, Herbert Read, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, American Abstract Expressionists, and Clement Greenberg helped Painters Eleven develop their own field of modernist discourse in Toronto. Informed by these widely influential contemporary figures, but often distilled in the reception of their ideas, Painters Eleven's writing and artwork push and pull within and against the limitations of their position as they attempt to expand their artistic circle into a global milieu.

I propose that Painters Eleven occupy an ambivalent, if not contradictory, position in the narrative of art history in Canada. While they are commonly acknowledged as the first abstract painters to burst the “parochial backwater” of Toronto and to “awaken” the rest of English Canada, they are just as often dismissed as derivative of American Abstract Expressionism or as a mere lead-in to the subsequent generation of controversial

⁵⁷ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000). “Intertextuality” was first coined by Julia Kristeva in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora et al (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). See also Roland Barthes, “Theory of the Text,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 2006), 31–47.

Toronto artists.⁵⁸ Just one year after Painters Eleven's inaugural show, a new cast of artists—Michael Snow, Graham Coughtry, Dennis Burton, and Gordon Rayner—followed with their own “shocking” exhibition at Hart House Gallery at the University of Toronto in 1955.⁵⁹ Writers Paul Duval, R.H. Hubbard, and Gerta Moray have also conflated Painters Eleven's visual practice with Abstract Expressionism, sometimes going as far as to accuse Painters Eleven of “copying New York,” or to refer to them as the “Canadian Abstract Expressionist movement.”⁶⁰ Additionally, despite Painters Eleven's national reputation, significant critical dialogue on the group is sorely lacking, as few texts outside of exhibition catalogues or anthology surveys have undertaken the subject.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Hale, *Out of the Park*, 14.

⁵⁹ See Hale, *Out of the Park*; and Barrie Hale, “Introduction,” in *Toronto Painting: 1953–1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Ottawa, 1972); and Ihor Holubizky and Robert McKaskell, *1953* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2003).

⁶⁰ See Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970*. (Toronto: Clarke Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1972); R. H. Hubbard, *The Development of Canadian Art* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1966); Gerta Moray, *Harold Town: Life and Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2014); and also Fenton, Terry, and Karen Wilkin. *Modern Painting in Canada: Major Movements in Twentieth Century Canadian Art* (Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers, 1978); Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People's Art*. (Toronto, New Canada Publications, 1977).

⁶¹ I refer here to publications that have taken as their subject Painters Eleven as a whole, and not to publications that focus on the individual artists, of which there have been a few significant studies. See for example Joan Murray, *Alexandra Luke, Continued Searching* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1987); Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape* (Toronto, Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981); Karen Wilkin, ed., *Jack*

Such publications tend to mythologize the group, as for example in Russell J. Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History* (1966), which describes Painters Eleven as "revolutionary," and a "noisy revolt," or in a number of catalogue essays written by Joan Murray, including *Origins of Abstraction in Canada: Modernist Pioneers* (1994) and *Painters Eleven in Retrospect* (1979).⁶² These authors may have taken their cue from Kay Woods, who in 1970 looked at the publicity surrounding Painters Eleven in the 1950s and took their avant-garde identity as truth based on remarks made by commentators like Vincent Tovell or newspaper clippings from the *Weekend Telegram* in 1957.⁶³ At the same time, however, a handful of texts since the early 1970s have attempted to dispel the notion that Painters Eleven were radical by deconstructing their avant-garde status and highlighting their debt to a successful self-branding strategy. Among those who have carried out this demythologizing work are Dennis Reid, who argues that Painters Eleven's success relied on their self-publicity, and Ihor Holubizky, who insists that Painters Eleven's 1953 exhibition *Abstracts at Home* "barely raised an eyebrow in critical

Bush (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart with Merritt Editions, 1984) and Marc Mayer and Sarah Stanners, eds., *Jack Bush* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2014).

⁶² Harper, *Painting in Canada*; Murray, *Origins of Abstraction*; Murray, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect*; LeClerc, *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada*; and Graham Broad, "Painters Eleven: The Shock of the New," *The Beaver* (February–March 2004); 20–26.

⁶³ Kay Woods, *A History of Painters Eleven* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1970), Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. See also Vincent Tovell, "Seven, Come Eleven: Eleven Painters Start a War," *Canadian Commentator* 1:11 (November 1957): 10; and "Weekend Tely: Toronto Artists Startle Canada," *The Weekend Telegram*, October 25, 1957, n.p., Painters Eleven File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Canada.

circles.”⁶⁴ Holubizky, in particular, upon dismissing the group as a mere blip in the already incoming tide of abstract painting in Toronto, makes a begrudging reference to Painters Eleven, as though exasperated with their persistence in the canon of twentieth-century art in Canada. For Holubizky, as well as Hale, it seems Painters Eleven was simply a beneficiary of coincidence—of being “at the right place, with the right ideas, and at the right time.”⁶⁵

While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the issue is divisive or even debated in a significant manner, the conflicting perspectives outlined above regarding Painters Eleven’s reputation bring to light the inconsistencies in existing literature. The state of the scholarship reveals that, because of the dire lack of critical consideration of the group, a number of fundamental questions have still not yet been satisfactorily answered: What, exactly, is the nature of Painters Eleven’s contribution to mid-twentieth-century abstraction, in the context of either Canada or the international world? Why have Painters Eleven come to represent a formative moment in Canadian artistic modernism, and how might such a modernism be defined with regards to visual practice, intellectual preoccupations, and historical and cultural specificity? To what extent can Painters Eleven be considered the avant-garde of midcentury abstraction in English Canada, and to what extent is the group simply a split-second snapshot into the “quaint conflict” against provincialism in stuffy Toronto?⁶⁶ And, does their contribution warrant their

⁶⁴ See Hale and Reid, *Toronto Painting*; Hale, *Out of the Park*; and Holubizky and McKaskell, 1953, 19.

⁶⁵ Holubizky, 1953, 19; and Hale, *Out of the Park*, 33.

⁶⁶ Hale, *Out of the Park*, 14.

long-standing status in the history of art in Canada? These pressing questions are central to my examination of Painters Eleven, and the nature of these questions is indicative of what is at stake in the undertaking of such a project—a comprehensive study of Painters Eleven must also argue for and validate the significance of the group as a subject in art history.

A diagnosis of Painters Eleven’s paradoxical position in art in Canada will find that there has been an inconsistent, or perhaps altogether improper, framing of the subject in existing literature. Scholarship on Painters Eleven often swings either end of the “avant-garde” question—that is, the tendency is to ask: Were they, or weren’t they, truly revolutionary in their time? Within this limited approach, any analysis of Painters Eleven’s artwork, philosophies, and actions is restricted to a binary set of criteria, oscillating between whether or not the group successfully measures up to the avant-garde benchmarks of formal innovation and social or political radicalness.⁶⁷ As a result, scholars such as those I have mentioned above have possessed an anxiety about understating or overstating Painters Eleven’s significance. This ambivalence usually surfaces when art historians confront the most fundamental aspect of the group—the practical and self-serving motivations behind their very existence. Self-promotion and branding are not only at the core of the group’s purpose and operations, but are also acutely associated with the commercial realms of advertising and marketing. Because Painters Eleven’s self-curated identity is incompatible with a modernist ethos of

⁶⁷ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, *Theory and History of Literature* Volume 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and University of Manchester Press, 1984).

enlightenment, art historians are often unable to resolve the incommensurability between Painters Eleven's use of blatantly self-publicizing tools and the ideologies of mythic avant-gardism, which may be defined loosely as a romanticized notion of social and economic marginalization.

In facing this conflict, some art historians have opted to call Painters Eleven's value into question. Like the aforementioned Holubizky, Dennis Reid has also suggested that the group's identity as a practical mechanism raises doubts about the legitimacy of their reputation. In his 1973 publication *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, Reid argues that Painters Eleven owe their enduring standing not to any "shocking" blows delivered by their paintings, but rather to the success of their marketing platform over the near-decade of their existence. "If *Abstracts at Home* had simply *assembled* these beginners at abstraction," Reid writes, "[the show] would long ago have been forgotten."⁶⁸ Reid's skepticism here also involves passing a judgement of value based on the quality of Painters Eleven paintings, referring to them as "beginners of abstraction" in a subtle disavowal of their aesthetic merit. Reid's tone of skepticism, echoed by Holubizky and to a certain extent by Barrie Hale, is common. It seems that Painters Eleven's existence as a cool-headed, professional marketing "mechanism"—rather than as a collective of inner trailblazing political and artistic passions like their Montreal contemporaries, the Automatistes—undermines any claim to their modernist vanguard status. This perspective fails to acknowledge that avant-gardism itself is not derived from an innate set of characteristics, but is, as Peter Bürger reveals in *Theory of the Avant-*

⁶⁸ Dennis Reid, *Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), 245.

Garde (1984) and his analysis of the historical avant-garde, historically contingent and constructed.⁶⁹

I suggest that the relationship between Painters Eleven, modernism, and avant-gardism must be reframed. Rather than ask, “were Painters Eleven radical?”—a question that restricts the parameters of discussion within a binary criteria of value—I ask: In what ways did Painters Eleven *frame themselves* and construct their own reputations as radical, and what can this self-curation reveal about national and international discourses on midcentury modern abstraction and avant-gardism? What exactly were their self-marketing and self-conceptualizing strategies, how did they employ these strategies both successfully and unsuccessfully, and how did these strategies constitute a particular set of understandings about contemporaneous artistic and critical activities of the postwar global art world? Underlying my line of inquiry is a crucial shift in the existing methodology on the subject. Instead of assuming that the emergence of “Canadian modernism” constitutes a natural step in a teleological narrative of twentieth-century art history in Canada, a narrative into which Painters Eleven must somehow be shoehorned, I aim to historicize the idea of Canadian modernism as a contested value whose construction as progress towards a “nationalist” or “internationalist” artistic identity can be historically located *through* an examination of Painters Eleven. In seeking to answer a central question—what was Painters Eleven’s contribution to mid-twentieth-century abstraction?—my approach offers an extended perspective on the transnational network of experimental abstraction in the postwar era.

⁶⁹ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

As an inquiry into their framing devices and strategies this project looks not only at Painters Eleven's artistic production, but also their group pursuits, operations, and written material in order to explore the artistic, the practical, and the discursive manifestations of their self-conceptualization. Of particular interest for this project are the historical circumstances of Painters Eleven's formation, their internal group dynamics, the process and execution of their exhibition initiatives, and their collective and individual writings both private and public. I examine a wide range of Painters Eleven's written material, including group exhibition and individual artist statements, newspaper and print media press, personal and professional correspondences, and private diary entries and notes. By investigating these textual documents together with the group's exhibitionary activities, a picture of Painters Eleven's philosophical ethos, and how this ethos motivated and informed their self-curating strategies as well as their visual practices, emerges. Most importantly, this picture offers insight into the process by which Painters Eleven conceived of themselves as an avant-garde group, how they understood their place within the larger art world, and how their aesthetic philosophies line up with this highly self-conscious outlook. In this sense, "self-curation" here refers not just to Painters Eleven's independent exhibition practices, or the hanging and arranging of their own gallery displays, but also to their self-conceptualization and self-branding dialogue—that is, the construction of a particular group identity and the outward projection of such a curated identity into the world.

Painters Eleven's public and private writings additionally reveal that these strategies were by no means part of a carefully plotted design. They did not deliberately calculate and then execute a planned self-marketing campaign to falsify their avant-garde

cohesiveness. Instead, their actions were informed by an internalized set of modernist ideologies, whereby the belief in their own vanguard qualities—including social marginalization, aesthetic radicality, and progress-oriented convictions—mobilized their self-mythologizing discourse. By nuancing Painters Eleven in this manner, my inquiry complicates art historical understandings and approaches to abstract artist groups and avant-gardism in the mid-twentieth-century. Unlike the legacy of the New York Abstract Expressionists or the School of Paris, whose contribution to modernism was cultivated in their own time by major art critics Clement Greenberg and Michel Tapié—in Tapié’s case, despite the chaos of the Paris scene—and unlike the Montreal Automatistes who were led by Borduas, Painters Eleven had no external advocate or champion to situate them within a given aesthetic narrative. They followed no particular theory or single style of abstraction, and offered little in the way of a unified aesthetic vision. Painters Eleven was above all a heterogeneity, fraught with internal conflict. In facing the challenge of accounting for Painters Eleven’s motley formation, I do not aim to provide a single cohesive chronicle of the group, but rather to focus on the tensions in order to underscore the complexities and contradictions embedded within their story. This approach will allow the discrete practices of each artist to be foregrounded without losing sight of their significance to the whole. As this project is an exploration of Painters Eleven as a historically-contingent construction, made out of an array of modernist ideologies stitched together to produce an illusion of togetherness, it also stakes out an alternative way of looking at artist groups and their responses to an international crisis of abstraction in the postwar era.

The chapters that follow will address the major aspects of Painters Eleven's self-conceptualizing strategies. Chapter Two, "The Struggle for Abstraction in Toronto" introduces the circumstances surrounding Painters Eleven's formation by situating the group's emergence within the controversy of modern art in Toronto and the grounds on which abstraction was debated from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s. By foregrounding this "crisis of abstraction," this chapter explores how Painters Eleven deliberately positioned themselves, both in their opening exhibitions and in their statement rhetoric, within an existing dialogue surrounding what was known as "modernistic" art and its relationship to Canadian artistic identity. Outlining Painters Eleven's distinct formalization of a particular pro-abstract, pro-modern position through the use of modernist language and logic, this Chapter Two historically situates and defines the parameters and major axes of the modernist discourse as it unfolded in Toronto. The debate over modern art is also examined here within a milieu of changing attitudes towards nationalism and the role of cultural production in Canada. In other words, this chapter asks, what conditions set the stage for Painters Eleven to be in the "right place, with the right ideas, and at the right time" in Toronto when they debuted in 1954?

Chapters Three and Four, "Internationalizing 'Harmonious Disagreement' in New York," and "The Failure of Cosmopolitanism in Paris," lead an inquiry into the global postwar world of abstraction by tracing the success and failure of Painters Eleven's attempts at international exhibition and recognition in New York and Paris at the peak of their momentum. In examining their choice of venue or location, their selected paintings, and their critical reception, these chapters highlight the artistic preoccupations and internal politics which plagued not only Painters Eleven, but also the international

artworld—a chaotic scene which Painters Eleven did not have a full grasp on. Chapter Three examines the group’s first and only showcase outside of Canada at the Riverside Museum in New York in 1956. While Painters Eleven considered this to be a landmark accomplishment which validated both the international quality of their abstraction and their vanguard status, they seemed unaware that their hosts, the American Abstract Artists society (AAA) were partial antagonists in a complicated New York scene—the bastions of the old avant-garde. Chapter Four exposes the critical fault-lines of Painters Eleven’s transnational strategies by investigating a planned exhibition in Paris, also to take place in 1956, that was abandoned and never realized. This failure of recognition outside of their nation is another indication of the group’s lack of awareness of the intricacies of international artistic politics, despite their attempts to weave themselves into this global network of discourse. These chapters offer an understanding of why Painters Eleven were not able to capitalize on the momentum they had achieved in the first few years of their existence—why they had so quickly fallen out of sync with fate, no longer “in the right place, at the right time” as they had been in 1954, but in 1956 finding themselves either in the right place but at the wrong time, or, at the right time but in the wrong place.

Chapter Five, “Creating the Space of Modernism” zeroes in on Painters Eleven’s artistic practice by looking at the impact of scientific discourses, especially those of space and technology, on their aesthetic philosophies. Offering an analysis of Painters Eleven’s appropriation and digestion of these ideas within a larger cultural dialogue, I argue that the group’s particular form of modernism emerges from their discursive binding together of two commensurate concepts of “space”—the pictorial and the metaphysical. Painters Eleven drew not only from artistic theories that insisted upon the universalizing capacity

of abstract pictorial space, but also from scientific-technologically defined notions of metaphysical space, which had penetrated popular culture through the new metaphysical dimensions of the Atomic Age and the Space Age. This approach offers a crucial insight into the specific artistic strategies used by Painters Eleven to bridge the gap between the universalizing convictions of abstraction and the increasingly urgent concern for national specificity in the wake of the Second World War.

Lastly, this project seeks to delineate the ways in which Painters Eleven's self-marketing and internationalizing strategies implicate the group in the construction of a larger art historical narrative, whereby the question of national identity is naturalized as an integral part of artistic production in Canada. As it has been persuasively argued by Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (2014), the writing of Canadian art history has since its inception in the late-nineteenth century prioritized the "quest to define what exactly constitutes the nation"⁷⁰ as an essential and fundamental criterion for Canadian art, and thus a determining factor in the inclusion or exclusion of particular artists in the canon. Asking, "why did one artist meet the standards for inclusion in the...twentieth-century narrative of Canadian art and not [another]?",⁷¹ Jessup, Morton, and Robertson offer a new critique of the field of Canadian art history which confronts the role of the capitalist liberal order that, beginning in the nineteenth century, sought out the construction of an

⁷⁰ Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson, "Introduction: Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada," in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, ed. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

art history that was necessarily a national(ist) chronicle—or in other words, a nationalist art history to validate the establishment and existence of Canada as a sovereign entity. A brief survey of the major texts that have surfaced over the past half century which discuss Painters Eleven within the narrative of twentieth-century Canadian art history reveals beyond a doubt that the group have been woven into the history as part of the “quest” to define nationalism in art.⁷² Historian Russell Harper set the precedent in 1966 for this particular interpretation by outlining how Painters Eleven were dealing with a “national inferiority complex.”⁷³ Scholarship is heavily implicated in the naturalization of the quest—questions about “what makes an art or artist Canadian” as presented by Terry Fenton and Karen Wilkin have served only to reinforce the limits of Canadian art within the framework of nationalism. In this model, artistic production is understood as part of the process of constructing the nation, relying primarily on the designation “Canadian” and limiting the way in which the visual in Canada is able to be studied.

Jessup, Morton, and Robertson suggest that a new approach to the question of nationalism in art history “might be simply to acknowledge the implication of art and disciplinary art history in liberalism” and to “study not only how this implication

⁷² See for example Sharon E. Brooks, “*Abstracts at Home*” *Against the Ideals of Nationalism: A Study of Exhibition Practices in Toronto 1940–1953*, Master’s thesis: York University, 1992; Harper, *Painting in Canada*; Dennis Reid, *Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988); Fenton and Wilkin, *Modern Painting in Canada*; and Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky, *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷³ Harper, *Painting in Canada*, 383.

functions now, but also how it has functioned in the past.”⁷⁴ This dissertation takes Jessup, Morton, and Robertson’s proposal into account by asking how Painters Eleven’s promotion of abstraction as an internationally-oriented national identity offered an alternative construction of nationalism in the arts. By establishing abstraction as a universalizing aesthetic—one that bridges geopolitical boundaries through its transcendent, non-figurative visual “purity”⁷⁵—Painters Eleven’s work was allied to the Massey Report’s cosmopolitan vision. In other words, Painters Eleven coincided with the government’s official promotion of a nationalistic cultural identity through an engagement with international aesthetic strategies. It is this overlap in cosmopolitan outlooks between official administrators of culture and individual artists, producers of culture, that allowed the group to enter into the narrative of twentieth-century Canadian art history, implicating Painters Eleven in the maintenance of the Canadian liberal order framework.⁷⁶ That is, Painters Eleven were seen as artists who could advance Canadian art history as a story of the inter/national in art, and thereby could be included in this history “without actually disrupting the basis of the narrative itself.”⁷⁷ It was their goal to be nationally recognized, and by 1960 Painters Eleven were officially recognized by the National Gallery of Canada, and since then the canonization of Painters Eleven’s version of inter/nationalism has contributed to the “obfuscation of any idea that there might be

⁷⁴ Jessup, Morton, and Robertson, “Introduction,” 17.

⁷⁵ Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity*.

⁷⁶ Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 81:4 (December 2000): 616–645.

⁷⁷ Jessup, Morton, and Robertson, “Introduction,” 15.

other competing notions of nationality within its borders.”⁷⁸ To fold Painters Eleven into the narrative of Canadian art without actually challenging its liberal order recreates the politics of cultural compromise. Drawing from Barbara Jenkins’ idea of the “transnational cultural ideology,” which refers to Canada’s prioritization of culture in the constitution of the nation within an international liberal order, I argue that Painters Eleven’s artistic cosmopolitanism offered a convenient parallel to the official institutional narrative whereby the contradictory relationship between nationalism and international is smoothed over in cosmopolitanism’s harmonizing process.⁷⁹

This dissertation is a focused examination of Painters Eleven and abstract painting in Toronto in the 1950s. It is an inquiry into ideas about modern art as they were received, understood, and articulated within the historically specific context of English Canada in the decade and a half after the end of the Second World War, and explores how Toronto artists grappled with concepts of modernism as it entered into the discourse of Canadian art. How can the artistic ideas and intellectual tendencies of Painters Eleven be accounted for through their interactions with both local and international preoccupations with defining modern art and culture? In what ways did their paintings, as well as their activities as a group, attempt to mediate or reconcile the universalizing convictions of modernism and abstraction with the increasingly urgent concern for national identity and practice in Canada during this period? In answering these questions, this dissertation will

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Barbara Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy and the International Liberal Order,” in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, ed. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 114–129.

also examine how the complex network of international discourses in art, abstraction, and cultural politics in the late 1940s and into the 1950s provided the historical circumstances out of which Painters Eleven came to be established as a force of Canadian modernism.

Chapter Two: The Struggle for Abstraction in Toronto

This exhibition is not a compact to agree, but rather the expression of a long repressed desire on the part of eleven painters to disagree harmoniously in terms visually indigenous to this age.⁸⁰

Painters 11, 1954

There is no manifesto here for the times. There is no jury but time. By now there is little harmony in the noticeable disagreement. But there is a profound regard for the consequences of our complete freedom.⁸¹

Painters 11, 1955

The above statements, published in the exhibition pamphlets accompanying Painters Eleven's⁸² first two shows at the Roberts Gallery in Toronto in 1954 and 1955, reveal the group's stance on the controversial issue of modern, or abstract, art. Behind the vague allusions to repression, the stated desire for "complete freedom" and "noticeable

⁸⁰ *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1954), n.p.

⁸¹ *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1955), n.p.

⁸² In their early documents, Painters Eleven referred to themselves interchangeably as "Painters 11" or "Painters XI." Sometime between 1955 and 1956, Painters Eleven changed the style of their moniker from "Painters 11" to "Painters Eleven" in their official documentation and has since been standardized as such. This dissertation adheres to the standardized style "Painters Eleven."

disagreement” in these exhibition materials is a direct reference to a contentious, highly-publicized debate regarding abstract painting taking place in Toronto, where artists and critics clashed in print media over the aesthetic and cultural value of an artistic practice that threatened traditional modes of pictorial representation. Painters Eleven were speaking as a collection of individuals who were exasperated with the antagonistic discourse that pervaded the topic of modern art not just within Toronto’s art scene, but also throughout local and national newspapers and magazines, from *The Toronto Telegram* and the *Globe and Mail* to *Canadian Art* magazine. Press coverage on the subject had been growing steadily throughout the 1940s. By the early 1950s the “crisis of abstraction,” as art historian Denise LeClerc has called it, had reached a critical breaking point, causing a schism among Toronto’s public and its artists who often chose to stand on either side of the debate.⁸³

In their exhibition statements, Painters Eleven referred to this divisive issue by calling it a “noticeable disagreement.” The group had good reason to frame their exhibitions as a response to Toronto’s modern art debate—art critics writing for the *Toronto Telegram* and *Evening Telegram Toronto*, among other newspapers, had been using their paintings as examples of “modernistic” or “radical” art since the late 1940s. Exhibition reviews and art editorials often mentioned their paintings by name and title, and sometimes the publication would feature image reproductions of their artworks as well. A prime example of how Painters Eleven members were caught up in the press is in the *Toronto Telegram*’s article “Is Art Revolution Here Or Is It Doodling Phase?,” written

⁸³ LeClerc, *The Crisis of Abstraction*.

by regular art columnist Rose Macdonald and printed on March 9, 1951 [Fig. 4].⁸⁴ This write-up was one of a flurry of articles that ran in local newspapers between March 8 and 11, all reporting on the latest—and perhaps the most dramatic—“modern art” scandal in the city.⁸⁵ That week, four prominent members of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) publicly resigned from the prestigious art society in protest against what they called “too much modernism” in the society’s annual exhibition.⁸⁶ These four artists claimed to be victims of a “modernistic invasion,”⁸⁷ arguing that they, as well as many other painters who practiced a conservative visual tradition, were squeezed out of exhibitions by the “trend” of modern art, which they described as “mumbo-jumbo,” “plain ugliness,” and “meaningless doodling.” Macdonald’s write-up on the scandal was accompanied by reproductions of six “modernistic” paintings, which were on display at the OSA exhibition in question. Three of these six images were by future members of Painters Eleven—*Release* (1949) by Jack Bush, *The Politician* (1950) by Harold Town, and

⁸⁴ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?,” *Toronto Telegram*, March 9, 1951, p. 3.

⁸⁵ See also “Protest ‘Doodles’ in Society Show, 3 Artists Quit,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 8, 1951, n.p.; Wessley Hicks, “Modernistic art fine for those who like it,” *Toronto Telegram*, March 9, 1951, n.p.; Roy Greenaway, “Rap ‘Monstrosities’ Say Show Committee Picked Own Pictures,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 9, 1951, n.p.; and “4 Artists Quit Society, ‘Too Much Modernism,’” *The Globe and Mail*, March 9, 1951, n.p.

⁸⁶ These four artists were Angus A. MacDonald, Archibald Barnes, Manly MacDonald, and Kenneth Forbes. “4 Artists Quit Society, ‘Too Much Modernism,’” *The Globe and Mail*, March 9, 1951, n.p.

⁸⁷ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

Rooster (c.1950–1951) by Oscar Cahén.⁸⁸ The story of the OSA resignations also made the front page of the *Toronto Daily Star*, where Jock Macdonald’s *Still Life with Yellow Bird* (1950) was reproduced.⁸⁹

When Painters Eleven referenced “noticeable disagreement,” they were speaking not as mere onlookers or conscientious bystanders, but rather as individuals who had been implicated in a developing dialogue about “modern art” by way of their inclusion in the press. This discursive positionality is key to understanding the motivations for Painters Eleven’s formation, including the public and self-promotional nature of the group’s written material, their exhibitionary activities, and the avant-gardist perspectives produced and enacted within them. In many ways, Painters Eleven’s statements and exhibitions were meant as an intervention into the conversation, directed not just at the critics who had targeted their artworks in their attacks, but also at the larger artistic conservatism of “Toronto the Good.” Between roughly 1948 and 1953, the eleven individuals had become increasingly ensnared in the debate over modern art and abstraction regardless of whether they had intended for their artwork to play such a role. A few of the artists, like Bush, Cahén, and Macdonald, were caught in anti-modern crossfire when their paintings were singled out by exhibition reviewers, while others actively and assertively inserted their voices into the dialogue. Most notable among the

⁸⁸ The other three paintings featured were Stanley Cooper, *Intersection*; Sydney H. Watson, *Black and Tan*; and LAC Panton, *Rock Cleft Composition 1950*. See Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

⁸⁹ “Protest ‘Doodles’ in Society Show, 3 Artists Quit,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 8, 1951, n.p. See also Jaleen Grove, *Oscar Cahén: Life and Work* (Toronto: Art Institute Canada, 2015), 26.

latter during this period is Alexandra Luke, who, as one of Toronto's most outspoken pro-abstract advocates throughout the 1950s, did not only defend modern art in opinion letters she wrote for the *Oshawa Daily Times* and *Toronto Evening Telegram*, but also presented a number of lectures on the topic at venues such as the Women's Lyceum Club and the Sackville Art Association.⁹⁰ Luke was also a crucial pioneer in modern art exhibitions Toronto, responsible for organizing one of the city's first "all-abstract" exhibitions in 1952.

I argue that Painters Eleven did not spark the "crisis of abstraction," but rather took their rhetorical and strategic cues from the dialogues that the crisis produced. This chapter investigates the art milieu of Toronto from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, before Painters Eleven came to exist. I seek to establish that by the time of their formation in 1953, a certain discursive framework surrounding the question of modern art in Toronto was already in development. In its partisan form, the eleven artists increasingly perceived themselves within the discourse as part of a marginalized, alienated vanguard fighting against traditional mentalities. In particular, I consider how the development of Painters Eleven's vanguard ethos may be chronicled through its embryonic stages—from the OSA's 1951 scandal, to the *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* in

⁹⁰ Margaret A. McLaughlin, "Defending Modern Art," Letter to the Editor, *Oshawa Daily Times*, n.d., 1933, Alexandra Luke file, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa; "A Painters Throws Light on Obscure Modern Art," unknown publication, 18 October 1947, Alexandra Luke file, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa; and Alexandra Luke, unpublished lecture transcripts, Alexandra Luke digital archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

1952, and the *Abstracts at Home* show in 1953—and the debates about modern art, culture, and taste taking place in Toronto’s public forum. In giving shape to the major cultural, social, and aesthetic concerns that defined the controversy over abstraction on a broader scale, I aim to contextualize Painters Eleven’s self-curating activities within these preoccupations.

For consistency and ease of reading, throughout this dissertation I refer to any member, and any grouping of the eleven members as “member(s) of Painters Eleven” or as “Painters Eleven,” even when discussing an event or period that occurred prior to the group’s formation. Occasionally this may also be denoted by using the phrase “future member of Painters Eleven.”

Painters Eleven, the Art Society, and the Public on “Modern Art”

A cursory scan of the six paintings reproduced in Rose Macdonald’s *Toronto Telegram* article “Is Art Revolution Here Or Is It Doodling Phase?” reveals that in Toronto in 1951, the range of painting techniques that were considered “modern” or “modernistic” were broad.⁹¹ The terms “modern art,” “modernistic art,” and “modernist art” were generally interchangeable, the “modern” moniker primarily referred to an artwork’s visual appearance, applying to any work of art that departed from attempts to capture mimetic and visually pleasing depictions of the world and its objects. Varying degrees of pictorial distortion and abstraction counted as part of a “modern” practice. Oscar Cahén’s *Rooster* [Fig. 5] and Jack Bush’s *Release* [Fig. 6], as examples featured in

⁹¹ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

the *Telegram* were “modernistic” because, despite their representational and recognizable references to a crowing rooster and a human figure, respectively, both paintings simplify the rendering of their subjects to a basic silhouette, only partially filled in with textural or modelling detail. *Rooster* and *Release* disfigure their forms to a certain extent. In *Rooster*, Cahén presents a bird with a third foot and no identifiable head—its comically agape beak, bulging eyes, and top crest float just above the neck, unattached to the rest of the body. *Release* reduces the human form down to a basic geometric outline, with no face, feet, or hands. Both paintings, however, maintain a consistency of spatial perspective by producing a distinguishable relationship between figure and ground. Cahén positions his subject in the world by placing the rooster atop a rocky formation, and Bush grounds his figure in a landscape, against the sky.

In contrast, two other paintings reproduced in the *Toronto Telegram* lean towards non-figuration, or non-representation, in that their distortions are exaggerated, or their forms heavily abstracted to outlines or shapes to the point where a visual and coherent recognition of each element is unattainable. Harold Town’s *The Politician* [Fig. 7] and Stanley Cooper’s *Intersection* [Fig. 8]—Cooper was not a member of Painters Eleven—make attempts to deny the spatial logic of figure and ground in many areas by fragmenting the pictorial surface into geometric forms. In Cooper’s *Intersection*, this dismantling of perspectival illusion is constructed through flattened, single planes of color, with some of areas of inconsistent shadowing which produce a disrupted sense of depth. Town’s *Politician* opts for a similar effect, but renders it through density rather than the suggestion of planarity. *Politician* suggests a human figure, presumably the politician denoted in the title, at the center of the canvas. His form is disfigured much in

the same way as his surroundings—as tight bundles of narrow, pointed, angular triangles—so that the density of the figure is almost indistinguishable from that of the air around him. Cooper and Town’s images are more aggressive than Bush and Cahén’s in their rejection of visual mimesis. Although theirs were mild in contrast, Bush and Cahén’s paintings were still deemed by many OSA exhibition visitors to be nearly as illegible, and just as unappealing. For example, one visitor to the exhibition was overheard to say, “it looks like a rooster, I think,” in reference to Cahén’s *Rooster*, to which her husband reportedly grunted in response, and said, “I wouldn’t eat it, not even if you fried it.”⁹²

In the press, “modern art” seemed to point not only to an artwork’s visual appearance—which, as evident in the differences between Cahén’s *Rooster* and Town’s *Politician*, could vary in the extent of its formal distortion or simplification—but also to the historical aesthetic innovations of European twentieth-century movements like Fauvism and Cubism. The abstractions initiated by Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso in the early 1900s, as well as Surrealism and Paul Cézanne’s post-impressionism, were quickly becoming institutionalized as the French “modern tradition” throughout the international cultural world, in Toronto as well as in Montreal, New York, and Paris.⁹³ In

⁹² Hicks, “Modernistic art fine for those who like it.”

⁹³ See Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris*; John O’Brian, *Ruthless Hedonism: The American Reception of Matisse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1985); and Gail Stravitsky and Katherine Rothkopf, eds., *Cézanne and*

1947, the Art Gallery of Toronto (AGT) hosted the exhibition *The Spirit of Modern France, 1745–1946*, which included paintings by Matisse, Cézanne, and Georges Braque, and reaffirmed France’s place as the “vanguard of civilization” in its catalogue foreword.⁹⁴ “Modern art” in Toronto’s print media and art world was used to describe both the historical paintings produced by Matisse, Picasso, and Cézanne in the late 1880s and early 1900s, and the contemporary paintings being produced in 1940s and 1950s Toronto that took the formal breakthroughs of these artists as their inspiration. Despite the institutional acceptance of Fauvism and Cubism taking place in major cultural centers, Picasso was not exempt from some of Toronto’s most fervent hostilities against modern art. Kenneth Forbes, who was one of the leading and outspoken “anti-moderns,” was of this particular mind, and is quoted to have said “Picasso is no good at all.”⁹⁵ Forbes was one of the four artists who resigned from the OSA in 1951.

To add further confusion to the vocabulary that was being used in Toronto during this period, “modern” and “abstract” were not always differentiated in their meaning. As curator Leah Dickerman makes clear in her publication *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (2012), there is a critical point of distinction today between “modern” art, which may encompass a certain level of representation, and “abstract” art, which, as Dickerman puts it, offers “no discernable

American Modernism (Baltimore and New Haven: Baltimore Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2009).

⁹⁴ “Foreword,” *The Spirit of Modern France: An Essay on Painting in Society, 1745–1946* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1947), n.p.

⁹⁵ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

subject matter” and “evacuates the object world.”⁹⁶ While “modern art” is predominantly understood today to be inclusive of “abstract art,” the reverse is typically not so. “Abstraction” currently designates complete non-figuration and non-representation—or paintings that, as Mark Cheetham explains, are “purely” form⁹⁷—but in Toronto in the 1940s and 1950s the definition was nebulous. Two examples underscore this point. First is an essay written by Lawren Harris, published in *Canadian Art* magazine in 1949, in which Harris defended modern art. In the article, entitled “An Essay on Abstract Painting,” Harris defined as “abstraction” as “abstracted from nature,” but distinguished it from “non-objectivity,” which he described as “simply a fine organization of lines, colours, forms and space independent of anything seen in nature.”⁹⁸ For Harris, abstraction was difficult to pin down, although it was fluid in its relationship to the natural world. Second, in 1952 Alexandra Luke organized the exhibition *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* which she referred to as the first national exhibition “devoted exclusively” to abstract painting. At this exhibition, “modern” was also interchangeable with “abstract,” since representations of the real-world were present in Bush’s *Angry Man* and Harold Town’s *Woman with White Cat*. It appears that “non-objectivity” was the only term that consistently denoted the total refusal, or “evacuation” of recognizable objects or figures.

To clarify these terms as they are used throughout my study, “modern art” will, unless specified otherwise, henceforth refer to its broad definition, applicable to any

⁹⁶ Dickerman, *Inventing Abstraction*, 13.

⁹⁷ See Cheetham, *Rhetoric of Purity*.

⁹⁸ Lawren Harris, “An Essay on Abstract Painting,” *Canadian Art* 6:3 (Spring 1949): 105.

painting which presents a non-naturalistic and non-illusionistic image through pictorial distortion. “Abstract art” and complete or full “abstraction,” along with any of its synonyms “non-objectivity,” “non-figuration,” or “non-representation,” will refer to painting that has no real-world references whatsoever. When in quotations, “abstract art” I denote its usage in 1950s Toronto, which is the broader sense similar to “modern art” during that time. Additionally, it appears that the term “contemporary” did not bear any significant meaning or usage in Toronto in this period, other than to refer to living artists in Canada. This is in contrast to New York and Boston, where in 1948 the Boston Museum of Modern Art changed its name to the Institute of Contemporary Art, leading to a maelstrom of politically-charged conflict over the museum’s abandonment of the term “modern,” which connoted progressive internationalism through abstraction, in favor of “contemporary,” which for some referred to leftist regionalism and figurative painting.⁹⁹ Although the controversy over “contemporary” did not enter into Toronto’s field of knowledge, the embroiled debate in Boston, centered around a change in just one word, points to parallel complications and debates caused by the idea of “modern art” beyond Canada.

⁹⁹ As Richard Meyer argues, the idea that modern art was a visual language of codes “reinforced cold war cultural politics at the time, including the suspicion that abstract and otherwise non-naturalistic art was un-American and tacitly, if not manifestly, Communist.” Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 194. See also Serge Guilbaut, “The Frightening Freedom of the Brush: The Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and Modern Art,” in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*, ed. Marcia R. Pointon (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 231–249.

Sorting through this clutter of terminology as it played out in Toronto in the 1950s is a critical task towards positioning Painters Eleven within a particular field of discourse, not as the city's natural vanguard or as the most radical of its artists, but as an assembly of individuals who mobilized the right language and practices to construct an identity for themselves *within* this field of discourse. By "discourse" I refer to what Michel Foucault has theorized as a historically contingent system of social and cultural relations that produces knowledge and meaning for both the subjects and objects within that system.¹⁰⁰ For Foucault, any given discursive system constructs the parameters of a subject's framing and position by producing "a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations," or an organizational field made up of prescribed categories of ideas, attitudes, statements, and practices.¹⁰¹ The "various situations" that the subject may occupy, according to Foucault, may be redefined through "the establishment of new systems of registration, notation, description, classification," including the introduction of new forms of information, relations with other theoretical domains, and with other institutions.¹⁰² Drawing from this understanding of discourse, I utilize the term here to address midcentury Toronto as a historically situated space for dialogue, one through which a complex intertwining between individual verbalizations and opinions, overall debates and discussions, and the evolving conversation regarding modern art, are all negotiated.

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Tavistock Publications/Pantheon, 1972).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 52

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 53.

It is important to understand that the dialogues between the artist, the press, and the broader art-viewing community is constitutive of the particular discursive space of modernism historically located in Toronto in the decade following the end of the Second World War. As art historian Jonathan Harris points out, “modern art’s meanings...cannot be achieved without the presence and influence of critical language” and “the world it creates.”¹⁰³ The “world” created by the debates in Toronto in the 1950s serves as what Foucault calls the “grid” or the discursive field in which Painters Eleven’s attitudes, statements, and actions acquire meaning. In order to appropriately contextualize Painters Eleven’s reputation as Toronto’s “modernist pioneers,” the parameters of their discursive framing *as* “modern” must be unraveled by investigating their subject position within it. In other words, in order to answer the question “how did Painters Eleven frame themselves as avant-garde?,” one must inquire and give shape to the surrounding system of cultural and social relations, as well as the realm of terms and reference points, from which the notions of “radicalism” and “modern art” were defined. As is evident in the public dialogue surrounding the 1951 OSA resignation scandal, the dimensions of the discursive space in Toronto were largely limited to a position either for or against “modern art,” with only rare moments of critical nuancing in between.¹⁰⁴ The widespread coverage of the OSA affair amplified the already existing hostilities between the “modernist” and “anti-modernist” camps, and intensified the division in opinion among

¹⁰³ Jonathan Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried and Clark* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 43.

¹⁰⁴ One example is Maxwell Bates, who, although he practiced “modern” art, was opposed to non-objectivity. See Bates, “The Flight from Meaning in Painting,” *Canadian Art* 11:2 (Winter 1954): 59–61.

artists and their viewing public. Because “modern art” was also an under-defined, all-encompassing term, this bifurcated framework would have led Painters Eleven to be perceived as rebellious “modernists” regardless of the extent of their abstraction.

Painters Eleven were by no means the only “modern” painters in Toronto. Edna Taçon, Fritz Brandtner, and the aforementioned Stanley Cooper, for example, were exhibiting non-objective, or fully abstract, paintings at OSA shows. Meanwhile, many of the canvases created by Painters Eleven and selected for display at the OSA in the early 1950s were representational to some degree, like Bush’s *Release* and Cahén’s *Rooster*. Although a number of Painters Eleven members were producing non-figurative artwork, like Hortense Gordon and Harold Town, the ones accepted by the OSA exhibition jury tended to adhere to Post-Impressionist, Cubist, and Fauvist techniques—examples include Alexandra Luke’s *Interior with Relics* [Fig. 9], Jock Macdonald’s *Still Life with Yellow Bird* [Fig. 10], and Ray Mead’s *Still Life on a Green Field*. These images make use of distortion but maintain figural references, and render their pictorial surfaces with either daubed texture, saturated color, or surface fragmentation to yield visual obfuscations of depth and disarticulations of foreground, background, and atmosphere. As art historian Robert McKaskell has pointed out, such pictures were not “particularly daring.”¹⁰⁵ McKaskell’s assessment is similar to one that Michael Leja makes of American Abstract Expressionism, which Leja claims were ideologically “tame” compared to the politically charged, “destructive, nihilistic component” of the European interwar modernisms of Dada or Surrealism, for example.¹⁰⁶ However modest in contrast,

¹⁰⁵ McKaskell, “Changing Academies,” 21.

¹⁰⁶ Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 23.

Toronto's modern paintings were still labelled as "hideous monstrosities" by anti-modernists like Forbes.

Even in the 1950s, contemporary figures recognized that Painters Eleven and many other modern artists in Toronto were unadventurous in their recycling early-twentieth-century aesthetic styles, while artists in Montreal were making leaps into innovative, daring modes of abstraction. One of Painters Eleven's contemporaries and a fellow modern artist, York Wilson, made this direct comparison in 1951, stating: "Quebec artists would consider [Toronto's modern art] namby-pamby...compared to what bursts on to canvas there."¹⁰⁷ Artists in Toronto were well aware of the developments in abstract and non-objective experimentation occurring in Quebec. French-Canadian art was included in nation-wide exhibitions at the AGT, including the annual Canadian National Exhibitions and Contemporary Canadian Exhibitions, which featured painting, sculpture, and watercolors selected by art societies throughout the country. Quebec art also made frequent mention in *Canadian Art* magazine, which in 1948 published a special issue dedicated to the arts in Quebec and "recent trends in Montreal painting."¹⁰⁸ Reproductions of images in the magazine included artworks by Alfred Pellán, who was the inspirational figure of the Automatistes, as well as those of Borduas, Goodridge Roberts, and Stanley Cosgrove. When Wilson referred to Toronto art as "namby-pamby," he was acknowledging that many of the local paintings which were deemed "radical" by

¹⁰⁷ York Wilson, quoted in "Art May Test Diplomacy of Lord Alexander," *Montreal Daily Star*, March 10, 1951, n.p. See also Wilson, quoted in McKaskell, "Changing Academies," 21.

¹⁰⁸ Special Quebec Issue, *Canadian Art* 5:3 (Winter 1948).

the press were tame in consideration against the captivating, visually charged surfaces and politically driven rebelliousness of Montreal's Automatistes and the Plasticiens.

While the Automatistes also took their aesthetic inspiration from an early-twentieth-century French movement, Surrealism, their ideological alliance with social and political revolution gave their particular visual forms a bold and forward-looking significance. Founded in the early 1940s by Paul-Émile Borduas, the Automatistes were a group of artists who rejected Quebec's institutional and cultural authorities. Demanding social and artistic liberation from the province's repressive environment, characterized by the extreme conservatism and clerical austerity of the regime of Premier Maurice Duplessis, the Automatistes published their manifesto of revolution *Refus global* in August 1948.¹⁰⁹ The manifesto pitted non-figurative painting¹¹⁰ against the stagnating and suppressive academicism in artistic production as it was controlled by institutions such as the École des Beaux-arts and the Musée des Beaux-arts. By the 1950s, a new group of non-figurative artists were emerging in Quebec. Les Plasticiens broke away from Surrealism's influence and the subconscious-revealing techniques of automatic drawing, and turned towards geometric abstraction, characterized, as Sandra Paikowsky explains, by rationalized pictorial structure, convergence of geometry and gesture, and

¹⁰⁹ Borduas, *Total Refusal*, trans. Ray Ellenwood, 37–41.

¹¹⁰ The Automatistes utilized the term “non-figuration” or “automatism” to describe their work, as it referred to the language of the French surrealists of the early twentieth century that based their artistic processes in automatic drawing. I use the term “non-figuration” here to denote this mode of abstraction. For an account of the evolution of the terminology of abstract art in Montreal, see Paikowsky, “Vivre dans la cite,” 39–58.

controlled form and alignment of shape.¹¹¹ In their paintings, Les Plasticiens retreated further away from the real world as a path towards spiritual liberation and universal collectivity. According to Paikowsky, their manifesto asserted that an “ideal ordering of the painter’s pictorial language” would create “a parallel reality” that emerged from “the authentic creative experience.”¹¹²

If Toronto art was “namby-pamby” in comparison to Montreal, how did Painters Eleven gain their reputations as English-Canada’s midcentury avant-garde? I argue that Painters Eleven capitalized on the perceived radicality of their aesthetic practice in the press and print media, exhibition statements and art society politics. Within the art milieu of “Toronto the Good,” where artistic and cultural conservatism “ruled the roost,” and modern paintings “stood out like sore thumbs” in art society exhibitions.¹¹³ Arts societies were academic institutions that dominated the system of arts circulation and sales, operating on the basis of member election and fees, jury-voted annual salons, and executive committees.¹¹⁴ Modelled after the distinguished academies of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe like the Royal Academy of the Arts in England and the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in France, art societies in Canada were established in the 1870s and 1880s. The oldest in Canada were its own Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA) and the OSA, but by the mid-twentieth century Toronto’s art scene was bursting with academies representing a multitude of visual art forms, including the

¹¹¹ Paikowsky, “Vivre dans la cite,” 39–58.

¹¹² Ibid., 41.

¹¹³ Jack Bush, quoted in Iris Nowell, *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 27.

¹¹⁴ See McKaskell, “Changing Academies.”

Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour (CSPWC) and the Canadian Society of Graphic Artists (CSGA). Arts societies dominated Toronto's system of art exhibition and circulation into the 1950s through their annual juried exhibitions, which were held at the Art Gallery of Toronto (AGT) and often traveled through organized regional art circuits, including the Western Ontario Art Circuit and the Maritime Art Association. As McKaskell explains, art societies and public galleries like the AGT were financially mutually dependent because there was very little public funding for the arts in Canada until the later 1950s. Societies provided the galleries with exhibitions to fill their spaces, and in turn the galleries offered the societies a display venue as well as institutional credibility.¹¹⁵

Society memberships required a nomination and election by majority vote. Membership provided artists with a way to display and sell their work to a wide audience. At the OSA, for instance, members were allowed to submit up to four original works for annual jury selection, whereas non-members are allowed only one. Interestingly, although many future members of Painters Eleven had already exhibited frequently and nearly annually at OSA, RCA, and other art society exhibitions since 1945, only a handful were elected members of these societies. In 1951, for example, only Jack Bush and Jock Macdonald were part of the OSA, but that year, all but three Painters Eleven members

¹¹⁵ McKaskell points out that only four cities—Quebec, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver—had buildings that were constructed specifically to serve as gallery spaces. Other galleries were often housed in other buildings, for example the Winnipeg Art Gallery was located in the Civic Auditorium Building, and in Oshawa, Ontario exhibition spaces were held in the YWCA, in London, Ontario they were in public libraries. See *ibid.*, 19.

had paintings exhibited at the annual exhibition. Tom Hodgson, Harold Town, and Walter Yarwood were elected in 1953, and Oscar Cahén followed in 1954. Snubbed in this membership process was Hortense Gordon, who was nominated alongside Hodgson and Town in 1953, but was not elected.¹¹⁶

Art society exhibitions were the primary battlegrounds for the acceptance of modern and abstract art. They were also the events that produced most of the public dialogue on the topic. However, besides the public conversation taking place in newspapers, where modern painting was ridiculed for being a “hoax,” “meaningless doodling,”¹¹⁷ and so hideous that “a child could do better,”¹¹⁸ the debate had also made its way into art society affairs. Although they are not candidly forthcoming about the actual terms of the discussions, the minutes from the OSA’s society meetings of 1950 and 1951 reveal that the issue of annual exhibitions and modern art were an underlying concern for its members.¹¹⁹ Of most interest here are the minutes from the meeting of March 14, 1951, where the resignation letters of Kenneth Forbes, Archibald Barnes, Manly MacDonald, and Angus A. Macdonald were read and submitted to the society.

¹¹⁶ Ontario Society of Artists Minute Books, November 1945–December 1952, F1140-3, MU 2255 Box #B287367, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

¹¹⁷ That modern art was “hideous,” “ugly,” and “meaningless doodling” is repeated in articles such as “Hideous, Sinister, he says,” unknown source, c. 1951, Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. See also Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?,” “Protest ‘Doodles’ in Society Show,” and William McCloy, “Growing Pains in the Arts,” *Canadian Art* 9:3 (Spring 1952): 127.

¹¹⁸ Paul Duval, “Art in the Department Store,” *Canadian Art* 2:3 (March 1945): 126–128.

¹¹⁹ Ontario Society of Artists Minute Books, November 1945–December 1952, F1140-3, MU 2255 Box #B287367, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Transcribed in these minutes is a reference to “serious consideration and lengthy discussion” among the society members. While no hint is given as to the exact nature of the conversation, this suggests that many individuals in the OSA were attentive to the implications of the resignations. At the same meeting, a letter from a member of the public was read aloud. Addressed to the OSA, Miss Marion Long “expressed concern over the large proportion of works of a modernistic character” included in the previous exhibition.¹²⁰ Strongly alluding to the possibility that she had a personal relationship with an unnamed OSA member, Miss Long’s letter stated that she “felt that these conditions were detrimental...to artists who did not paint in the modernistic manner,” and also suggested that “the Society give serious consideration to the points raised by a member.” Again, the minutes are vague and do not reveal any explicit details about the “points raised by a member.” However, it points to the fact that modern art had been a previous topic of discussion, and perhaps of heated debate, at society meetings.

In contrast to the neutral and disinterested tone of the OSA minutes, which maintain the professional appearance of the Society as a whole, the language used by its individual artists in the public arena was not as civil. The four OSA resignees took to the press to air their grievances and to complain about being victims of a modernistic “invasion.”¹²¹ The *Toronto Daily Star*, writing on the scandal, reported that “promising young painters” were having difficulty having their works selected by society juries

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

unless they “adopted the trend of modern art.”¹²² One of those resigned, Angus A. Macdonald was quoted as saying “they no longer hang my pictures,”¹²³ while another, Barnes, reportedly “disliked the trend...very intensely,” and said “this insane modernism is like a rotten apple, with the rot spreading and leaving a bad smell behind.”¹²⁴ Accusations were made of bias and fraudulent misconduct—according to the *Daily Star*, the resignees claimed that the jury selection committee “picked their own pictures.”¹²⁵ The public also weighed in. “The current [OSA] exhibition,” wrote A. Ellis to the editor of the *Daily Star*, “is truly in keeping with the trend of that organization these last few years...now dominated by a few modernists, is no longer representative of public taste nor of Ontario artists’ taste....Our finest painters have ceased to submit their works, knowing it to be condemned.”¹²⁶ Others defended the OSA exhibition’s inclusion of modern art, calling it “inventive” and “the most stimulating and laudable display the [OSA] has put on for a decade.”¹²⁷ According to Rose Macdonald in the *Toronto Telegram*, the resignations came as a shock but “it had been known for some time that the dissatisfaction existed.”¹²⁸ Members of Painters Eleven were not only aware of these

¹²² Roy Greenaway, “Rap ‘Monstrosities’ Say Show Committee Picked Own Pictures,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 9, 1951, n.p.

¹²³ Macdonald, quoted in *ibid.*

¹²⁴ “Bitter Quarrel Started Over Art Show Exhibits,” *Hamilton Spectator*, March 9, 1951, n.p..

¹²⁵ Greenaway, “Rap ‘Monstrosities’ Say Show Committee Picked Own Pictures.”

¹²⁶ A. Ellis, “Criticizes OSA Show,” Letter to the Editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, March 20, 1951.

¹²⁷ Quoted in McKaskell, 21.

¹²⁸ Macdonald, “Is Art Revolution Here?”

newspaper articles—they also actively collected the clippings. Kazuo Nakamura, for instance, kept a collection of all the aforementioned articles, exhibition reviews, and letters to the editor.¹²⁹

For “anti-modern” artists, modern art’s refusal of mimetic representation was a serious affront to the practice of image-making as a tradition based on knowledge and training. According to this conservative perspective, abstraction turned its back on the “proper sphere” of the human race, wherein the relationship between artist and nature is expressed as timeless “discernment of beauty.”¹³⁰ It is no shock, then, that “modernistic” paintings were chiefly accused of being hideous and meaningless, bearing the dislike of the general gallery-going public. Art’s value as an articulation of the beauty of the natural world could not be found in images that denied representation as the only criteria for signification. When exhibited in the same space as conservative figuration, like the quaint seaside village scene painted in Fred H. Brigden’s *Bay St. Lawrence* [Fig. 11] or the view of Alberta’s prairie farmlands presented in A.Y. Jackson’s *October, Twin Butte, Alberta* [Fig. 12], modern painting such as Town’s *Politician* and Cahén’s *Rooster* would have “stood out like [a] sore thumb” and drawn the ire of its viewers.¹³¹ Luke once witnessed a spectator “explode” upon seeing such paintings, and reported that the viewer angrily

¹²⁹ Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹³⁰ Statement issued by the Ontario Institute of Painters for the *Points of View* show, featuring the Ontario Institute of Painters and Painters Eleven at the Public Library and Art Museum of London, October–March, 1958–59. See William Heine, “Points of View Make a Lively Show,” *Weekend Magazine* 8:45 (1958): 16–18.

¹³¹ Jack Bush, quoted in Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 27.

exclaimed: “I should like to rip those off the wall and tear them in shreds.”¹³² Luke, often writing under her married name Margaret McLaughlin, was an ardent, vocal supporter of modern art, and contributed to the print media dialogue directly. As early as 1933, she had written a defense of “the modern school,” against “that group of academicians... who cannot tolerate the change from old to new.”¹³³ Luke addressed the issue again in 1947, declaring that “to the uninformed,... the modern approach is distasteful. To the student of 20th century art it is vital and stimulating, after decades of realistic painting.”¹³⁴

Not surprisingly, modern art was a hotly opposed issue, often framed as an “us versus them.” This is critical to understanding how Painters Eleven were perceived, which was intertwined with how they perceived of themselves. Their self-identification as “modern” or avant-garde artists is consistent within the discursive positions available to them in Toronto at this time. Within these parameters—where modern art was openly ridiculed with hostile antagonism—Painters Eleven developed a sense of marginalization and, crucially, a sense of opposition against a predominant traditionalism. As a result, Painters Eleven internalized conflict as the primary framework for legitimizing modern art in their world. When the eleven artists finally came together in 1953, they conceptualized their group within this discussion. Painters Eleven formed as a strategic

¹³² Margaret A. McLaughlin, “A Painters Throws Light on Obscure Modern Art,” unknown source, 18 October 1947, Alexandra Luke file, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹³³ Margaret A. McLaughlin, “Defending Modern Art,” letter to the editor, *Oshawa Daily Times*, n.d., 1933, Alexandra Luke file, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹³⁴ McLaughlin, “A Painters Throws Light on Obscure Modern Art.”

enterprise which prioritized the construction of a social unity among similarly marginalized individuals against what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a “common enemy,” here in the form of conservative anti-modernists.

It is in this regard that Painters Eleven were able to frame themselves as an avant-garde collective, despite their lack of personal cohesion. As Nancy theorizes in *The Inoperative Community*, the sense of unity or the “community” within groups is “not innate or essential, but rather historically dependent and contingent upon a shared interest in the dismantling of an enemy—a contingent being-together...that [is] constantly negotiated.”¹³⁵ In this assessment of “community,” Nancy challenges definitions of collectivity that are dependent upon absolute or natural states of being. Rather, Nancy bases his notion of collectivity on the condition of relationality—what Nancy calls a *being-in-common* of sociality. Because this concept of community does not rest on presuppositions of a shared, fully defined ideological identity, the state of *being-in-common* is understood instead to be determined by specific historical conditions out of which any particular collective, forged as a set of relationships between other groupings, can have meaning.¹³⁶ In 1950s Toronto, Painters Eleven manufactured just such an identity of cohesion and collectivity. Their grouping as English-Canada’s midcentury modernists is not defined as a sum collection of fully identified, innately vanguard

¹³⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). See also Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, “Introduction: Communities of Sense,” in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, eds. Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

¹³⁶ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.

individuals, but rather as a *being-in-common* contingent upon their surrounding historical and social conditions. The conditions of possibility for Painters Eleven to be established as avant-garde is formed through the discourse which provided for the eleven artists a “common enemy”—the repressive art societies and anti-modern conservatives. Painters Eleven were clear to situate themselves in opposition to predominantly traditional attitudes towards art production in Toronto.

An interesting contradiction reveals itself here. While traditional artists like Forbes and Barnes claimed their canvases were being increasingly marginalized in art society exhibitions, conversely, modern and abstract painters argued it was *their* works which were the targets of jury selection prejudice. According to Jock Macdonald, Painters Eleven’s images “were usually hung in corners, relegated to the small side rooms, dispersed and placed among landscapes, still-lives and figure paintings.”¹³⁷ This puts both sides of the modern art debate into perspective. The question arises: to what extent were Painters Eleven or traditional artists truly discriminated against? The rancor against modern painting was in fact limited to public opinion and the press. Forbes, Barnes, Manly MacDonald and Angus Macdonald were right to be concerned about the status of naturalism in the OSA—more and more space was being given to non-illusionistic and abstract art in Society exhibitions as well as other Toronto art events. Although it is impossible to accurately trace the growth of modern painting throughout all of Toronto’s

¹³⁷ Jock Macdonald, “Statement on the Painters Eleven Group of Toronto, Canada,” in *A Canadian Portfolio: The Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts Looks at Art in Canada, September 3–November 3, 1958*, ed. Myra C. Livingston (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1958), n.p.

art exhibitions from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, it is clear that the proportion of modern to traditional works was steadily increasing. The OSA's 1951 exhibition was not the first time that "excursions into the abstract" were given substantial attention in the Society. Their 1945 exhibition dedicated an entire room to "post-dimensional art" and "experimental art, which "aroused considerable controversy."¹³⁸ In 1951, approximately one in three accepted canvases represented the "modernistic" trend, and by 1957 full abstraction was the majority of the work represented at the Second Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting.¹³⁹

Figurative representation was being pushed out, and modern painting was slowly taking its place as the mainstream. However, it must be stressed again that the "modern art" that was so passionately contested in these society exhibitions was, as Roald Nasgaard puts it in his book *Abstract Painting in Canada*, "a little too restrained and polite to stoke the creative fires of a generation eager to set the world aflame."¹⁴⁰ Cahén's

¹³⁸ Pearl McCarthy, "Ontario Society of Artists Encourages New Experiments," *Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1945.

¹³⁹ This is a rough estimate made by consulting the list of exhibited works from the 1951 OSA catalogue. These estimates are conservative. It is impossible to accurately determine how many of the eighty-eight accepted exhibition submissions were "modernist" works. However, out of the thirty-five images which were reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, thirteen might be considered "modern," or to have a certain level of visual distortion or abstraction by which they were identified as such. The approximation of one in three canvases is drawn from the assumption that the reproductions in the catalogue correspond to the ratio of "modern" to "traditional" art in the full exhibition list. For figures regarding the Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting, see McKaskell, "Changing Academies," 16–36.

¹⁴⁰ Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada*, 92.

Rooster and Luke's *Interior with Relics*, although groundbreaking for some of Toronto's most conservative art viewers, were "namby-pamby" compared to the extent of abstraction that they, and most other Painters Eleven members were experimenting with. By 1951, both Cahén and Luke were producing fully non-objective artworks, like *Still Life*, a pastel on board Cahén created in 1950 [Fig. 13], and *Untitled*, an oil on canvas painted by Luke circa 1951. This is true of many members of Painters Eleven. In this light, the claims being made by modern artists about their marginalization may need to be re-interpreted. Perhaps these artists were not alleging that "modern art" was being dismissed by selection juries, but rather, that non-objective, non-figurative works were being shut out for being too "extreme" in their total abstraction.¹⁴¹ This would explain why "modernists" felt alienated, even though the exhibitions were including more modern paintings. If there were prevailing prejudices against non-figuration, then artists would be left with little choice but to submit only the most tame and representative of their paintings for jury review in order to secure a place in the annual exhibitions. In the debate over which aesthetic had the upper hand in art societies, each side's argument must be taken with a grain of salt.

In an ironic parallel, the mismatch between the neutral tone of the OSA's minutes and the bitterness of anti-modernist language in the press bears a striking resemblance to the contradictory rhetoric found between Painters Eleven's private and public statements. As the OSA minutes retained civility and professionalism, so too did Painters Eleven's public writings—either in the press or in their exhibition or artist statements—take on an air of courtesy and cordiality. Similarly, just as the OSA resignees and other critics used

¹⁴¹ Heine, "Points of View Make a Lively Show," 16.

inflammatory remarks against modern art, so did Painters Eleven make aggressive and spiteful language in their private correspondence. When Painters Eleven finally formed, the exhibition pamphlet for their inaugural exhibition at the Roberts Gallery in 1954 read: “This exhibition is not a compact to agree, but rather the expression of a long repressed desire on the part of eleven painters to disagree harmoniously in terms visually indigenous to this age.”¹⁴² In 1955, a similar sentiment is expressed: “There is no manifesto here for the times. There is no jury but time. By now there is little harmony in the noticeable disagreement. But there is a profound regard for the consequences of our complete freedom” [Fig. 14].¹⁴³

These statements are petitions for civility, a call to “harmony” or respectful consideration among those in disagreement, instead of the hostility that characterized many of the attempts to ridicule and discredit either side of the argument. But the ceremonious language also exudes a hollow, disingenuous air. In their attempt to casually disengage from the debate by requesting tolerance and “complete freedom” in the choice of artistic practice, Painters Eleven instead seemed to be congratulating themselves on taking the moral high road. The statements, which are apparently not to be taken as manifestos, instead employed the rhetoric of courtesy by choosing refined words like “harmony” and “disagreement” to refer to a situation clearly marked by childish insults and belligerence. Two interpretations of this careful phrasing are applicable here. First, it speaks once again to the presence of “British dullness” in Toronto, in contrast to *Refus global*’s blasphemous passion which expressed “a savage need for liberation”—that

¹⁴² *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1954), n.p.

¹⁴³ *Painters 11* (Toronto: Roberts Gallery, 1955), n.p.

despite the bitterness of the situation, an English civility and stiff upper lip are maintained in the public forum.¹⁴⁴ Second, Painters Eleven's word choice can be understood as a manipulation of public opinion and public relations. In portraying themselves as modest victims of abuse, Painters Eleven could appeal to Toronto's conservative sensibilities, and serve as a foil to the churlish behavior of Forbes, Barnes, and other anti-modernists. Additionally, in its use of the term "indigenous" when defining modern art as being "visually indigenous to this age," Painters Eleven's 1954 statement uses embellished language to align themselves with the philosophically modernist idea that art should represent the spirit and outlook of an artist's contemporary age.¹⁴⁵

For many members of Painters Eleven, their exhibition statements were in fact disingenuous, insincere, and a manipulation of the public. Painters Eleven may have been taking the moral high road in their public rhetoric, but their actual, resentful perspective on the modern art debate in the press and their conservative art society colleagues is evident only in their private correspondence. Resentment and self-righteousness were expressed by Jock Macdonald and William Ronald in particular, belying their plea for "harmonious disagreement" in their 1954 exhibition statement. Their comments could be as nasty as those made by Forbes and Barnes. "Those bastards [at *Canadian Art*]," Ronald wrote to Bush in 1955, "that lousy book penetrates the U.S., England, and Europe as being Canadian art and in the spring issue I see not a mention of any us... I'm really

¹⁴⁴ Borduas, *Total Refusal*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ See Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846: On the Heroicism of Modern Life," and "The Painter of Modern Life," in Francis Francina, and Charles Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London: Paul Chapman, The Open University, 1982), 17–19, 23–28.

furious about that.”¹⁴⁶ Macdonald, writing to Luke about her solo show at the May Gallery in 1955, said: “enjoy your show no matter how much unenlightened creatures like McCarthy pass it off with platitudes. Perhaps she will realise that she has a blind spot when she sees your show?”¹⁴⁷ Pearl McCarthy was an art critic for the *Globe and Mail* whose weekly column “Art and Artists” covered visual art in and around Toronto. McCarthy was a particular source of resentment for Macdonald. “The Globe & Mail ignoring...the ‘PXI’ is interesting,” he wrote to Ronald, “McCarthy is stumped and doesn’t want to risk her neck.”¹⁴⁸ It is strange that McCarthy would elicit such derision from Macdonald, since her reviews of Painters Eleven and other abstract shows took on an open-minded, non-judgmental view of modern art and also often encouraged her readers to do the same.¹⁴⁹ In fact, Harold Town expressed a sentiment very much opposed to Macdonald’s in a letter to McCarthy in 1957, stating his appreciation for her role in the

¹⁴⁶ Correspondence William Ronald to Jack Bush, n.d, Box 5A, File 12, Painters Eleven Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁴⁷ Correspondence Jock Macdonald to Alexandra Luke, 10 January 1955, Box 2, Envelope F, Alexandra Luke Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁴⁸ Correspondence Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 9 May 1955, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

¹⁴⁹ As early as 1945, for example, McCarthy had offered placating remarks to her readers to ease the “fear of new-ism,” stating: “It is not merely tolerance but it is admitting that a skilled and successful artist may wisely do some laboratory experiments in art to keep his mind exercised, the OSA has championed a vital principle: the search for truth must be endless, because it is in the search that art derives its life.” See Pearl McCarthy, “Ontario Society of Artists Encourages New Experiments,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1945, p. 3.

recognition he received.¹⁵⁰ What this demonstrates, however, is that some members of Painters Eleven felt more disgruntled than others regarding their status and public image as it was being negotiated and produced through newspapers and *Canadian Art*, and that these individual verbalizations and opinions are intertwined within, and constitutive of, the overall series of debates and discussions in Toronto.

While it would be mistaken to assume that Painters Eleven held unanimous beliefs and opinions about their reception, it is through this particular set of dialogues that it becomes clear that the sense of persecution that Macdonald and Ronald describe—in a rhetoric that suggests a purposeful suppression of the public recognition of *their work specifically*, that those with authority were “out to get them”—is to become embroiled in the avant-garde standing that they would later attain. As Michael Leja reminds us, “one way of gauging the level of... interest in avant-garde status is to look for the use strategies characteristic of the avant-garde, for example the production of manifestoes, public controversies, and protest exhibitions.”¹⁵¹ Although their 1955 exhibition statement claims that “there is no manifesto here,” their pronouncements nonetheless give expression to an avant-garde ethos which, as Renato Poggioli has theorized, indicate

¹⁵⁰ Thanking McCarthy for first encouraging him in 1944 when he was still an art student, Town wrote: “Since then you have mentioned me many times, and I wish to acknowledge the very considerable part your perceptive attention has played in the recognition I have received.” Correspondence Harold Town to Pearl McCarthy, 26 January 1957, Private Collection. For more on Pearl McCarthy and her impact on the public’s reception on contemporary art of Toronto in the 1950s, see Beth Greenhorn, “An Art Critic at the Ringside: Mapping the Public and Private Lives of Pearl McCarthy,” Master’s Thesis: Carleton University, 1996.

¹⁵¹ Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 23.

certain “aesthetic and artistic precepts” centered around “an argument of self-assertion or self-defense...against society.”¹⁵² For Poggioli, the emergence of avant-garde art is not a natural reality but rather coincides with its conceptualization as a “rationalized alienation.” Regardless of the refusal of the nomenclature “manifesto,” Painters Eleven’s statements act as documents that translate their “noticeable disagreement” or conflict with Toronto’s conservative society into a self-curated avant-garde identity.¹⁵³ What Poggioli calls “rationalized alienation” here is similar in function to Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of a “being-in-common” against a shared enemy.¹⁵⁴

Macdonald was particularly outspoken about his sense of self-righteousness in the face of anti-modern derision. In 1956, when Painters Eleven and abstraction had gained a major foothold in Toronto, Macdonald, Bush, and fellow modern artist Sydney Watson were on the hanging committee for the Canadian Group of Painters (CGP) society exhibition. According to Macdonald, he took the opportunity of this small position of power to spite the Society’s traditional artists by giving his fellow abstract artists and Painters Eleven members the prime spots in the AGT galleries, and shunting the rest off to the sides. Macdonald boasts of this act in a letter to Ronald: “The way Bush, Watson, and I hung the Can. Group of Painters exhibition has sure caused a frothing in the minds of many of the artists of Toronto...Lawren Harris, Town, Mead, Bush, Ronald, Hodgson ...Yarwood, myself, Oscar...and other abstractions holding other key positions

¹⁵² Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 4.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Nancy, *The Inoperable Community*.

in the South gallery. We relegated the Schaefers, Ogilves, Haworths, Paraskeva Clarks, Rakines, Peppers, and so on to the two side rooms.”¹⁵⁵ The extent of his vindictiveness is surprising, and in direct contradiction to Painters Eleven’s petition for “harmonious disagreement.” Macdonald’s personal malice does not stop at exhibition curating. He continues: “We also kept all those [artists] out of the catalogue too so you can imagine the long faces and nasty coldnesses, going on during the opening, in every corner...what can they expect?...pack [Painters Eleven] out on the fringes? Not this time anyway. No sir!”¹⁵⁶ It seems that Macdonald considers this move to be one of retribution for previous art society exhibitions where modern art was, from his viewpoint, similarly repressed. Forbes and Barnes’ earlier accusations of favoritism and misconduct in OSA juries—that modern artists were selecting their own, or other modern paintings, for annual exhibitions—would be accurate in this case.

Painters Eleven’s written material foregrounds a crucial aspect of the group—contradiction and conflict. Evidently, Painters Eleven took criticisms personally and vindictively, while at the same time their official documents remained consistent in their adherence to the reserved expectations of English-Canadian politeness. This is a constant throughout their lifespan as the group—the conflict between the internal and external dialogues and writings and articulations of the group. Crucial to this study is revealing the impracticality of asking “were Painters Eleven avant-garde?” because of its implication that “avant-gardism” is an essential state of being. Many scholars, such as

¹⁵⁵ Correspondence Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 13 November 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Kay Woods and Russell Harper, have used Painters Eleven's claims of persecution, together with the anti-modern antagonism printed in Toronto's press, as evidence of Painters Eleven's vanguardism.¹⁵⁷ Such approaches, however, yields to what Hal Foster refers to as "the tendency to take the avant-garde rhetoric of rupture at its own word"¹⁵⁸—that is, the assumption that the discourse should be taken as truth, rather than as a historically dependent condition of relationality. As Foster also points out, such a misinterpretation of avant-garde texts fails to consider their "deferred temporality of signification," or that their vanguard identities are a "retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings."¹⁵⁹ In the case of Painters Eleven, more recent art historians like Ihor Holubizky and Dennis Reid have begun to demythologize the group by highlighting the "retroactive" work done by earlier scholars to construct Painters Eleven's avant-gardism. As a discursive strategy, Painters Eleven's use of the language of "harmonious disagreement" to conceptualize themselves as the avant-garde artists was effective in situating the group within the discursive positions available to them in Toronto in the 1950s.

¹⁵⁷ Kay Woods, *A History of Painters Eleven* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1970), Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa; and Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

¹⁵⁸ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 10.

¹⁵⁹ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 8.

The Artist, the Layman, and the Nation

Although Painters Eleven were not necessarily revolutionary in their aesthetic practice, they did represent a first in Toronto—the first independent group of artists to operate outside of the system of art societies. The foundational purpose of the grouping was to circumvent the restrictions and bureaucratic practices of art academies which they believed discriminated against modern painting. Because art societies controlled the production and exhibition of art in the city, artist-operated and self-curated exhibitions were nearly unheard of in Toronto before Painters Eleven. By 1953, self-assembled groups of artists in Canada were known primarily in Montreal, where the Automatistes and Les Plasticiens held ground. Although independent artist groups were previously unknown, Toronto had been exposed to a few “all-abstract” exhibitions by this point. These unaffiliated shows of contemporary Canadian artists were typically run by the few small gallery owners or art patrons in the city who supported modern and abstract art.¹⁶⁰ Commercial galleries were few and far between, with the Roberts Gallery, where Painters Eleven held their 1954 and 1955 exhibitions, being one such rarity.¹⁶¹ A significant part of the discourse surrounding these exhibitions involved the question of the “layman,” which means that the approach was one of education and knowledge about the artistic techniques of modern art in order to influence the tastes of the public towards recognition of its validity as well as its value. Part of the issue for artists in general was getting the

¹⁶⁰ See McKaskell, “Changing Academies.”

¹⁶¹ For more on the growth of commercial galleries in Toronto in the 1950s, see Sharon E. Brooks, “*Abstracts at Home*” *Against the Ideals of Nationalism: A Study of Exhibition Practices in Toronto 1940–1953*, Master’s thesis: York University, 1992.

public interested in Canadian art in the first place, making education part of their dialogue and mission. Karen Finlay has acknowledged that Canadians during this period were surprisingly unaware of contemporary artistic activities, leaving radio producers like George Robertson with the hope that radio's "most effective role in the art field" would be to heighten public interest in the arts and to expose the public to Canadian art.¹⁶²

Small galleries and dedicated modern art supporters were responding to this issue of the uninterested and uneducated layman by spearheading exhibitions of all-abstract work in Toronto. One of the earliest of these exhibitions was *Excursions in Abstract* held at the T. Eaton Fine Art Gallery of Toronto in 1945. The gallery was located in the Eaton's department store on College Street. Selected artists for the show included a generation of painters from before the Second World War, who represented some of Toronto and Montreal's earliest abstract practitioners—Fritz Brandtner, Henry Eveleigh, Gordon Webber, Edna Taçon and Lawren Harris—as they experimented with the aesthetic throughout the 1930s. The central purpose of *Excursions in Abstract*, according to Nasgaard, was to elucidate the processes by which an artist works "from original subject matter to the final graphic abstraction."¹⁶³ Each painting in the exhibition was accompanied by an artist statement, which intended to explain to their working methods and diverse approaches to abstraction to the viewing public. In 1950, local artists Albert Franck and R.F. Valkenberg organized the *First Annual Exhibition of Unaffiliated Artists*,

¹⁶² Finlay, *The Force of Culture*; and George Robertson, "Art and the Radio Audience," *Canadian Art* 9:1 (Autumn 1951): 3–5.

¹⁶³ Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada*, 92.

also held at the T. Eaton Fine Art Gallery, which included works by future Painters Eleven members Town and Cahén.¹⁶⁴ The exhibition continued annually through 1951 and 1952, and was a primary venue for unaffiliated artists—or artists who were not elected members of any art society—could show their work.

The year of *Excursions in Abstract* was the same year that the OSA first included “experimental” modern art in their annual show. As expected, both exhibitions were reviewed by art critics in the press. Since a majority of the dialogue being generated in Toronto was being produced in mass media, these reviews were aimed at the general public. As Paul Duval, art editor for the *Toronto Telegram* and general interest magazine *Saturday Night*, reported in his article for *Canadian Art*: “it may be safely stated that the exhibitions [at the T. Eaton Fine Art Gallery] have been responsible for introducing countless citizens of Toronto and visitors to the most recent developments in Canadian art.”¹⁶⁵ *Excursions in Abstract* in particular was geared towards the education of the public, since each artwork was accompanied by a series of comments and explanations regarding the methods of their abstraction.¹⁶⁶ Significantly, because the exhibition was meant to demonstrate the process of creative production from “original subject matter to the final graphic abstraction,” these artist statements encouraged the public to better understand non-figuration by suggesting that each painting bore a visual relationship to the natural world at its core. As a venue for the sale of abstract art in addition to this didactic purpose, the exhibition encouraged the everyday public to make a purchase of

¹⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, and also Nowell, *Painters Eleven*, 231.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Duval, “Art in the Department Store,” *Canadian Art* 2:3 (March 1945): 126.

¹⁶⁶ Nasgaard, 92.

one of the paintings as an investment in living Canadian artists.¹⁶⁷ The emphasis on exposing and educating the “layman” to modern art carried through well into 1953. In the *Globe and Mail*, Pearl McCarthy described the OSA’s 1949 show as “[offering] laymen a prime chance to inform themselves on what [radical] artists are driving at,”¹⁶⁸ and Jock Macdonald, in his opening speech for the 1952 YWCA *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* in Oshawa, asserts that the “abstract painter is looking and seeing much more than meets the eye of the layman observer.”¹⁶⁹

The exhibitions at the T. Eaton Fine Art Gallery bear an interesting parallel to a major development in art-viewing forums in New York which took place just three years earlier. Before he opened his own gallery on 57th Street and Madison Avenue in 1945, Samuel Kootz, art dealer and champion of American Abstract Expressionism was invited to organize an exhibition of contemporary American art at the Macy’s department store in 1942.¹⁷⁰ The exhibition of 179 paintings—including those by Abstract Expressionists

¹⁶⁷ Similar events advertised as a chance to “proudly” own a Canadian-made artwork include the exhibition put together by the Women’s Committee of the Art Gallery of Toronto. See “Coast to Coast in Art: Do You Own a Canadian Picture?,” *Canadian Art* 5:3 (Winter 1948): 139; and Joanne Stoddart, “‘Anyone Can Afford Art’ Slogan of Committee,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 17, 1952, n.p.

¹⁶⁸ Pearl McCarthy, “Society’s Exhibit Had Lay Appeal, Arouses Criticism,” *Globe and Mail*, March 4, 1949, p. 25.

¹⁶⁹ Notes on Macdonald’s lecture recorded by Alexandra Luke in her personal notebook, 21 April 1952, Box 3, Envelope B, Alexandra Luke File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

¹⁷⁰ The Kootz Gallery was the first gallery outside of Canada to represent a member of Painters Eleven. William Ronald signed with Kootz in November 1956. On Kootz and Macy’s department store, see Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of*

Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko—was on display at Macy’s eighth floor galleries for three weeks, and each of the artworks was on offer for purchase. Like the shows at T. Eaton, Macy’s promoted their exhibition as a path towards public exposure to modern art as well as public interest in buying it. The press release declared: “Macy’s presentation of this important exhibition to a larger-than-usual audience, combining the regular gallery visitors with the department store public, constitutes an experiment which may very well determine the future of exhibits of this sort.”¹⁷¹ It also advertised prices ranging from \$24.97 to \$249. As Serge Guilbaut explains, Macy’s commissioning of this exhibition is not just evidence of a growing interest in modern art in New York, but also indicative of a “sharp upturn” in public spending in the United States as a newly affluent middle-class exploded in the nation’s postwar economic boom of consumerism.¹⁷² The country, Guilbaut writes, “seemed to have developed an insatiable appetite for the arts,” and it was not the aristocratic collectors, but the middle-class, who were the movers of the new art market.¹⁷³

In Canada, however, much more work needed to be done to drum up public interest in contemporary Canadian art, since knowledge was severely lacking, and the art itself “virtually ignored.”¹⁷⁴ According to Jock Macdonald, “appreciating abstract art” involved delving into cultural competence by attending art exhibitions, reading

Art Dealing in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and also Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 67.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures*, 240.

¹⁷² Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 91–95.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷⁴ See Finlay, *The Force of Culture*; and Robertson, “Art and the Radio Audience,” 3–5.

publications on twentieth-century art, and also “by accepting with an open mind the artist statement and by searching deeply...[to find] the clue, not in relation to an object, landscape or model, but in relation to rhythm, form and color.”¹⁷⁵ For Pierre Bourdieu, “cultural competence” in art designates the ability to decipher an image based on a mastery of knowledge, or “schemes of perception and appreciation.” A work of art has “meaning and interest,” Bourdieu argues, “only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.”¹⁷⁶ Recognizing that tastes are socially conditioned to demarcate the high from the low, the “legitimate” from the “illegitimate,” Bourdieu’s model apprehends artistic taste as a social rather than a personal function, and one that also reveals one’s educational and class background. When Painters Eleven and other modern art supporters appeal to the “layman,” then, it can be understood as an attempt to redefine the parameters of the cultural code in Toronto in the 1950s, and to discursively shift the scheme of perception within contemporary Canadian art so that modern painting becomes “legitimate.” Framing the problem in this way, Macdonald’s speech on the appreciation of modern art continues through a disarticulation of the code wherein the institutionally valued figurative and landscape painting style held dominance, turning it into a realm of *incompetence*. Laymen,

¹⁷⁵ Notes on Jock Macdonald’s lecture recorded by Alexandra Luke in her personal notebook, 21 April 1952, Box 3, Envelope B, Alexandra Luke File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁷⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); see also Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in J. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood: 1986), 241–258.

Macdonald argues, often “make the mistake of saying ‘well I know what I like’ as though that were some very great accomplishment. Even the cattle in the fields know what they like.”¹⁷⁷

The need for explication was not just limited to the misguided public. In 1944 *Canadian Art*, a “high” art journal that catered to a readership with a greater knowledge of art, published two articles on art appreciation for the layman, or the “uninitiated,” tackling “The Problem of Distortion” and whether “Modern ‘Isms’” were art.¹⁷⁸ This kind of contribution to the discourse, as an endeavor to mediate between artists and the public, can also be seen in Lawren Harris’ “An Essay on Abstract Painting,” published in *Canadian Art* in 1949.¹⁷⁹ Like Macdonald and Luke, Harris’ attempts to subvert the codes that dictate taste by inscribing the aesthetic with “high art” values against “low” forms of popular culture and mass media. He insists that the “layman” will over time “learn to distinguish between good and mediocre abstract art,” and that currently “his vision is conditioned by advertising and movies and photographs...this connection of the visual language of abstraction to the real/natural world hinders his full appreciation.”¹⁸⁰ Harris writes that he is “confident that the public, though at first antagonistic, will catch up with the new style and embrace them.” Crucially, his essay also offers some preliminary

¹⁷⁷ Notes on Macdonald’s lecture recorded by Alexandra Luke in her personal notebook, 21 April 1952, Box 3, Envelope B, Alexandra Luke File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

¹⁷⁸ “Art: The Problem of Distortion,” *Canadian Art* 1:4 (April–May 1944): 148–150, 171; and “Are The Modern ‘Isms’ Art?,” *Canadian Art* 1:5 (June–July 1944): 197–98, 223.

¹⁷⁹ Harris, “An Essay on Abstract Painting.”

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

approaches towards this manner of “distinction” by aligning abstraction with cultural elevation, which dovetailed with the larger concerns over “progress” and “modernity” circulating in cultural political discourse at the time.

In the decade following the end of World War II, the question of Canadian cultural identity had reached an unprecedented urgency in the minds of cultural critics and intellectual figures throughout the nation. For these critics, the deluge of “progress” in the forms of mass entertainment, mass consumerism, and technologically-driven society had the potential to create a Canadian population of “leisured morons, living by push-button techniques while starving in mind and soul.”¹⁸¹ Postwar Canada was being infiltrated by American culture, and with the introduction of television in Canada in 1952, Canadian commentators were increasingly alarmed by what they saw as vapid and decadent materialism. Lawren Harris, when writing of “advertising and movies and photographs,” also expressed his belief that cultural standards needed to be elevated, and that the masses needed rescue from the “inexhaustible” supply of comic books and slick magazines, “pin-up girls, coca-cola virgins [and] boogie-woogie.”¹⁸² Historians L.B. Kuffert, Phillip Massolin, and Damien-Claude Bélanger have all acknowledged that modernization and “modernity” in this sense—characterized by the industrial and technological advancements towards mass culture in the postwar age—was seen as an

¹⁸¹ G.P Gilmour, “Chairman’s Message,” Canada’s Tomorrow Conference, 1953, cited in Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 162.

¹⁸² Harris, quoted in Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 162.

imminent crisis for Canadian society, a dangerous threat to the humanities and intellectual rigor in education, high cultural standards, and religion and morality.¹⁸³

University of Saskatchewan professor Hilda Neatby, in her book *So Little for the Mind* (1953), offered a critique of a Canadian education system that was slowly prioritizing vocational and technical education—what was called “progressive” education—and letting liberal humanities fall at the wayside.¹⁸⁴ For Neatby and others, “progressive” pedagogy was detaching society from its human relationships with nature, and the individual’s relation to the social world of humans around him. Such tendencies in education, argued J.M. Ewing for example, would produce “shallow, unindustrious, pleasure-seeking, aggressive, and un-disciplined people.”¹⁸⁵ Another early critic included University of Toronto English professor Marshall McLuhan whose book *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), was a similarly moralistic consideration of the role of technology and mass advertising in the homogenization of society and corruption of intellectual values.¹⁸⁶ McLuhan would later turn away from this moralistic perspective and become one of the foremost media theorists of the twentieth-century in his investigations into the role of media and communication in the structuring of human perceptions and interactions.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ See Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 2003; Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity*; and Bélanger, *Prejudice and Pride*.

¹⁸⁴ Hilda Neatby, *So Little for the Mind* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1953).

¹⁸⁵ J.M. Ewing, “Our Progressive Education,” sixth in the series *Our Changing Values*, broadcast September 15, 1948, cited in Kuffert, 164.

¹⁸⁶ McLuhan, *Mechanical Bride*.

¹⁸⁷ See Lance Strate and Edward Wachtel, eds., *The Legacy of McLuhan* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2005); Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,

In Canada, modernity and technology became increasingly associated with American culture, and the penetration of this culture into Canadian societies was seen by many as a crisis that jeopardized the very future of Canada as a sovereign political entity. “We are indeed fighting for our lives,” Harold Innis declared in his 1952 publication *The Strategy of Culture*.¹⁸⁸ Evoking the gravity of the postwar situation of the nation, Innis’ militarized rhetoric continues: “The pernicious influence of American advertising...[has] been evident in all the ramifications of Canadian life.” This, he writes, “is to strike at the heart of cultural life in Canada.... We can only survive by taking persistent action at strategic points against American imperialism in all its attractive guises.”¹⁸⁹ As a “footnote” to the *Royal Commission on the National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences* led by diplomat Vincent Massey from 1949–51, Innis’s powerful espousal echoed the Report’s warnings of the “very present danger of permanent dependence” on American culture.¹⁹⁰ The Massey Report’s findings of cultural impoverishment in Canada and a severe lack of federal support for national broadcasting, art and literature, and university education was an alarming wake-up call for those who had not yet seen the severity of the problem. The fear of American “cultural imperialism” was compounded

1990); and Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (Toronto: Random House, 1989).

¹⁸⁸ Harold Innis, *The Strategy of Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), 52.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Canada, *The Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951), 18.

by escalating economic and military ties with the United States, which raised further concerns about the loss of sovereignty in Canadian policy.¹⁹¹

For Innis and Massey, however, all was not lost. In spite of the bleakness with which they portrayed Canada's cultural present, the possibilities for a Canadian cultural resistance were spelled out in both texts as a redoubled effort to define and fortify the sphere of Canadian cultural identity, awakening an optimism within this moment of perceived national crisis that would reverberate throughout the nation's artistic and intellectual landscapes. In doing so, the official stance on modern art and cultural elevation came to develop along the very same discursive axes as those on the ground—the artists in Toronto who claimed abstraction as the “legitimate” mode of cultural competence. While “modernism” in society was associated with mass consumerist decadence and moral decay, “modernism” in visual art and painting was being aligned with high culture. Just as Macdonald and Harris did in their texts, the Massey Report also attempted to reverse the parameters of the cultural taste in Canada by shifting its code of perception. In the disarticulation of the cultural code where figurative and landscape painting style held dominance, the Massey Report reconfigured abstract painting into the position of the “legitimate” or the realm of the “culturally competent,” and demoted traditional modes of artistic production into the realm of *incompetence*. In other words, modern art had state-level support by 1951. One of the most crucial excerpts of the

¹⁹¹ See note 27; and also Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2003); and Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

Massey Report was reprinted in *Canadian Art*'s special coverage of the Report in the Summer 1951 issue: "Modern painting can no longer exploit the novelty of the Canadian landscape...Our young painters are being judged on exactly the same footing as the abstract painters of other countries."¹⁹²

In the United States a similar conversation about raising American public taste was taking place at the level of intellectual art criticism. In his 1947 essay "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" published in *Horizon*, New York art critic Clement Greenberg argued that an American vanguard was the key to battling the culturally degrading effects of mass entertainment.¹⁹³ Echoing his thoughts on "kitsch" from an earlier essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (1939), Greenberg contended that pulp fiction novels, tabloid magazines and advertisements, and Hollywood movies were "vulgarizing" American culture, and that "cultivation" was needed in order to raise "the lowest standards of consumption" among the "American 'common man.'"¹⁹⁴ Like the

¹⁹² "The Royal Commission—Excerpts from the Report," *Canadian Art* 8:4 (Summer 1951): 177. Also quoted in Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada*, 92.

¹⁹³ Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 160–170.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162–163. See also Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5–22. Caroline A. Jones has additionally pointed out that Greenberg's essays are infused with a misogyny that gendered his definitions of high culture and low culture. Jones argues that Greenberg's modernism was coded as masculine, rational, and virile, while mass culture was "dangerously female." See Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 90–91.

intellectuals, artists, and cultural critics in Canada, for Greenberg the answer was education of the layman—the middle class—through the arts. Unlike Canada, however, where critics pointed the finger at the United States as the invasive cultural threat, for Greenberg the danger was in Soviet Union and the homogenizing forces of communism.¹⁹⁵ By the late 1940s, the fear of communism was becoming a near-hysteria in the United States, as Cold War tensions fueled accusations of “un-American” and undemocratic activities.¹⁹⁶ Greenberg’s essays in the 1940s are infused with these larger apprehensions, as one of his major preoccupations during this period was identifying the characteristics of “American” painting. In his “Present Prospects” essay, for example, Greenberg pointed to a number of aspects in the artwork of Jackson Pollock, who he championed as one of the “only” promising prospects for culture, that defined him as “radically American”—a full “assimilation” of French art but “urban” in its violence, intensity, massiveness.¹⁹⁷ In an ironic turn of events, Greenberg and Pollock would gain widespread public notice in *Life* magazine in 1947 and 1948—a publication that Greenberg associated with mass “vulgarization.”¹⁹⁸ Additionally, as the 1940s moved into the 1950s, the art market in New York surged, intertwining high art with consumer

¹⁹⁵ See Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*.

¹⁹⁶ The House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed by the United States House of Representatives in 1938 to investigate allegations of disloyalty within the public and the government.

¹⁹⁷ Greenberg, “The Present Prospects,” 166.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* See also “Jackson Pollock: Is He The Greatest Living Painter in the United States?,” *Life*, August 8, 1949, pp. 42–45; and “A Life Round Table on Modern Art,” *Life*, October 11, 1948, pp. 56–70, 75–80.

society through the proliferation of commercial art galleries and dealers which commodified art. Serge Guilbaut has noted that this explosion of the art market was a new shortcut for the rising middle class in the United States to gain cultural capital—a place where it was “possible for the harried buyer to gain in status by being seen as a ‘cultivated man.’”¹⁹⁹

In Canada, a separation between the high and low spheres continued to be pushed. Jody Berland has acknowledged that the Massey Report, in staking a claim for abstract painting as a way for Canada’s artistic production to be viewed as on par with, or on “the same footing” as global developments, the Massey Report “placed modernist art discourse at the centre of the country’s new official culture.”²⁰⁰ According to Berland, the Report was “nationalist in rhetoric but internationalist in its proposed aesthetic strategies,” and in this appeal to international interest, the Report aligned itself with a growing cosmopolitan outlook on cultural identity in Canada. Ulrich Beck has defined cosmopolitanism as a worldview that bonds national and international cultural preoccupations together by “situating local cultural affiliations within the context of a universal whole.”²⁰¹ The Massey Report insisted that the key to cultural elevation in

¹⁹⁹ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 92. See also Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York, Greenwood), 241–258. By 1960, Toronto would also experience a tremendous growth in commercial art galleries and dealers.

²⁰⁰ Jody Berland, “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis,” in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), 25–26.

²⁰¹ Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), 247.

Canada was not in geographic nationalisms but rather in abstract painting and its particularly international, if not its “universal,” character. In Toronto, Painters Eleven’s cosmopolitan leanings lined up with these official ideas, and were articulated in their early public writings and exhibition statements of 1952 and 1953. Of interest here is Painters Eleven’s awareness of international developments in modern art at midcentury, which contributed to their belief in the transcendental visual language of abstract painting.

Two exhibitions of the early 1950s reveal Painters Eleven’s desire to be “up-to-date” with global developments and experiments in abstraction.²⁰² These exhibitions also set into motion the formation of Painters Eleven as an organized group in 1953. The *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* (1952) and *Abstracts at Home* (1953) shows, arranged by Alexandra Luke and William Ronald respectively, each contributed significantly to the immediate circumstances out of which Painters Eleven emerged. In the autumn of 1952, the *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* opened at the Adelaide House Young Women’s Club Association (YWCA) in Oshawa [Fig. 15]. The show was conceived and organized by Luke, who was then a board member of the Oshawa YWCA art committee. Luke considered it to be “the first of its kind in Canada” and “the spring board into general acceptance of abstract art.”²⁰³ Inspiration for this YWCA exhibition may have been

²⁰² Ronald, quoted in “Abstract Art Show Will be Intriguing,” *The Daily Times-Gazette* (Oshawa-Whitby), October 17, 1952.

²⁰³ Letter template from Margaret McLaughlin of the Oshawa YWCA to invitees of the 1952 YWCA *Canadian Abstract Exhibition*, dated 9 August 1952, Box 3A File D, Alexandra Luke File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

catalyzed by Luke's visit to New York City in 1951 with her friend Martha Jackson, whose New York gallery played a crucial role in developing the abstract art scene in New York after its opening in 1953. Luke and Jackson attended the symposium held in conjunction with exhibition *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* at the Museum of Modern Art in February 1951.²⁰⁴ The symposium is one of the landmark moments in the narrative of American Abstract Expressionism.²⁰⁵ It is where artists Robert Motherwell, Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, and Willem de Kooning read statements about "What Abstract Art Means to Me" in response to the debate about "modern" and "contemporary" art in major cultural centers in the United States.²⁰⁶

In New York, the emergence of Abstract Expressionism was also a contested field of art production in the battle over modern art, among critics and also in the press. In 1951 *Life* magazine published a story on the "Irascibles"—a group of eighteen abstract artists who issued an open letter to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, protesting

²⁰⁴ File 2, Alexandra Luke File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

²⁰⁵ See Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); and Michael Auping, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1987).

²⁰⁶ George L. K. Morris, Willem De Kooning, Alexander Calder, Fritz Glarner, Robert Motherwell, and Stuart Davis, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 18:3 (Spring 1951): 2–15. See also Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?*

the institution's discrimination and "notorious hostility to advanced art."²⁰⁷ The artists—who were given the moniker "Irascible 18" or simply "The Irascibles" by the press—included Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and many others who would become firmly associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement. The article on the Irascibles was the latest in a series of previous *Life* features covering the controversy over modern art in the United States, including a story on Pollock entitled "Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" in 1949, a clipping of which can be found in Kazuo Nakamura's press collection.²⁰⁸ In 1948, *Life* published a roundtable discussion among fifteen art critics who "undertake to clarify the strange art of today" in 1948.²⁰⁹ This "Life Roundtable on Modern Art" featured critics like Greenberg, whose writings on abstract

²⁰⁷ "Open Letter to Roland L. Redmond," May 20, 1950; "Irascible Group of Advanced Artists Led Fight Against Show," *Life*, January 15, 1951, p. 34; see also "18 Painters Boycott Metropolitan; Charges Hostility to Advanced Art," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1950.

²⁰⁸ "Jackson Pollock: Is He The Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life*, August 8, 1949, pp. 42–45. For more on *Life* magazine's coverage of modern art during this period, see Bradford R. Collins, "Life Magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, 1948–51: A Historiographic Study of a Late Bohemian Enterprise," *The Art Bulletin* 73:2 (June 1991): 283–308. Educational articles published by *Life* include an account of Cubism on May 2, 1949, and an article on Stuart Davis printed in the February 17, 1947 issue. *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ "A Life Round Table on Modern Art: Fifteen Distinguished Critics and Connoisseurs Undertake to Clarify the Strange Art of Today," *Life*, October 11, 1948, pp. 56–70, 75–80.

art played a highly influential role in formalist art criticism.²¹⁰ This article, which attempted to “explain” modern art to the everyday reader of *Life*, bears a crucial parallel to the print media battle occurring simultaneously in Toronto. Fought along the same terms, the American debate was also taking shape as a question of artistic conservatism, educating the layman, and elevating society through distinctions between “high” and “low” forms of culture.²¹¹ Even in New York, where gestural abstraction was a few years ahead of Toronto, “modern art” still needed to be mediated by an expert. In the roundtable, Greenberg mobilizes a rhetoric of purity to ascribe meaning to abstraction, by insisting that painting’s significance lies in its primacy of the aesthetic experience and the direct visual encounter between image and viewer, instead of in its subject matter or content.²¹²

²¹⁰ Jones, *Eyesight Alone*; Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art*; Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*; and Frascina and Harrison, eds., *Modern art and Modernism*.

²¹¹ “A Life Round Table on Modern Art,” *Life*, October 11, 1948, pp. 56–70, 75–80. See also “Why Artists Are Going Abstract: The Case of Stuart Davis,” *Life*, February 17, 1947.

²¹² *Ibid.* In 1960 Greenberg would publish his essay “Modernist Painting” where he elaborated on this idea, coining the term “self-criticality” which he defined as “the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” This notion has come to serve as an essential element in Modernist ideology and its belief in the value of self-sufficiency and autonomy. See Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–106. For commentary and critique of Greenberg’s approach, see Harris, *Writing Back to Modern Art*; Jones, *Eyesight Alone*; and Francis

Where Greenberg might have served as a critical platform for directing this new notion of value or quality in New York, in Toronto there was no comparable figure in critical art-writing to bridge artists with viewers, or to champion their art as the avant-garde. Painters Eleven and other modern artists were constructing the field of discourse themselves in their artist statements and exhibition statements, but in doing so were drawing from their exposure to these debates as it was available to them in Toronto. Nakamura's collection of print media clippings demonstrates an awareness of more widely distributed, broad-audience publications like *Life* magazine, but not of the smaller circulation of intelligentsia culture like *Partisan Review* which were so crucial to the dissemination of Greenberg's ideas and the development of formal art criticism in New York. Toronto's art scene also would not have had access to the storm of debate that occurred in 1948 between New York and Boston, when the Institute of Modern Art in Boston changed its name to the Institute of Contemporary Art.

In their exposure to certain parallel debates across the border, Painters Eleven would have had greater reason to consider themselves part of a burgeoning Toronto avant-garde. Luke was also aware that abstract artists in the United States had already created their own independent society in the form of the American Abstract Artists (AAA), which was founded in 1936.²¹³ Writing to Lawren P. Harris—son of Lawren

Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

²¹³ The AAA were formed in much the same way as Painters Eleven—in 1935 four artist friends met in a studio to discuss exhibiting together, and then extended invitations to other artists in their circle to join their group. For a brief documentation of their

Harris—Luke considered the possibility of forming a similar “Abstract Canadian Group” in the wake of the success of the *Canadian Abstract Exhibition*.²¹⁴ Luke’s exhibition is recognized as the earliest showcase of all-abstract paintings to take place on a national scale, presenting the work of twenty-six artists (out of an invited fifty-six) from Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and New Brunswick, and traveling to galleries throughout southwestern Ontario and other parts of Canada, including Hart House in Toronto. The show contained Painters Eleven “in embryo,” as Joan Murray has described it,²¹⁵ featuring the work of nine out of the eleven future members of the group, missing only Yarwood, who was invited but did not participate, and Nakamura. Although Luke was, at the time of the exhibition, familiar with a few of these artists, particularly Gordon and Macdonald, it was through the organization of the exhibition that she came to correspond and meet with others, including Hodgson, Cahén, and Bush.²¹⁶

Here again, one of the primary reasons for an all-abstract exhibition was for public recognition and education. The *YWCA Canadian Abstract Exhibition* was

beginnings, see Susan C. Larsen, “The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History 1936–1941,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 14:1 (1974): 2–7.

²¹⁴ Correspondence Alexandra Luke to Lawren Harris, 18 November 1952, Box D, Alexandra Luke File, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

²¹⁵ Joan Murray, *Alexandra Luke: Continued Searching* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1981), 4.

²¹⁶ Other invitees included Quebec artists like Borduas, Pellan, and Leon Bellefleur, whose works had also made appearances in Canadian Art, as well as west-coast artists Jack Shadbolt and B.C. Binning, and, in addition to future Painters Eleven members, local Toronto figures Yvonne McKague Housser, Edna Taçon, Sydney Watson, L.A.C. Panton, Lawren Harris, and others.

conceived as an opportunity for modern art in Canada to be recognized and evaluated among other like-minded artists, and to bring this approach and understanding to the public. For some artists, however, such an issue was, by 1952, reaching its limits in terms of relevance for the rest of the art world. As Ronald's statement on his painting *Christmas Sensations* says:

As the ultimate aim of this show is to bring a stronger understanding of modern art to the public, I have submitted this more extreme example, although it is thirty years old, at least in its general conception. There is nothing new in the absence of reference to nature in the visual arts....but now...it is more difficult to get a positive communication with the untrained viewer.²¹⁷

The discourse of the layman and the problem of taste resurfaces in this dialogue, and with it Ronald expresses his frustration with the situation wherein abstract painters must consistently defend their position against an undecided, "untrained" public. It is a perspective that is consistent in another of Ronald's articulations in 1952, where he states that "Canadian art today has reached, or is about to reach a turning point....Circumstances challenge us to go further in helping give Canada a more mature

²¹⁷ *YWCA Canadian Abstract Exhibition* (Oshawa: 1952).

and broader language in all fields. ...not only [for] laymen but [also] many artists.”²¹⁸ In these statements, Ronald echoes a larger preoccupation with consumerism and “low” forms of visual consumption in the world of cultural politics and art in English-Canada during this period, and makes an appeal to the production of an elevated class of art-goers.

The notion that a “turning point” in Canadian art was not only imminent, but also necessary for cultural progress and maturity, was one that infused the critical modernist position taken up by Painters Eleven and other pro-modern supporters. There was, according to Ronald, enough explanation of “modern art’s” within an evaluative framework beyond mimetic logic. It was delineated by the criteria of aesthetic autonomy, the self-sufficiency of the pictorial surface, and emotional coherence for modernism’s universal language to become an integral part of Canadian art’s discursive structure. Each of the artist statements in the catalogue can be read as a bringing forth of these ideas. Hodgson’s artist statement for the 1952 exhibition reads: “You should see these paintings as an esthetic unit of sight sensations, something to stimulate and excite you, without the bothersome effect of all sorts of symbolisms, theories and traditions to confuse you.”²¹⁹ By asserting that previous conceptions or theories of what art should be or should look like are inconsequential to the process of receiving a painting’s “sight sensations,” Hodgson inscribes the ideology of aesthetic purity and universality, into the Toronto

²¹⁸ Correspondence from William Ronald to the Canada Foundation for Canadian Amateur Hockey Association Scholarship, 28 October 1952, R2113, Box 52, Ronald Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

²¹⁹ *YWCA Canadian Abstract Exhibition* (Oshawa: 1952), n.p.

discourse. As Charles Harrison has argued, modernism's claims to autonomy are grounded in the assumption that an ideal sensitive observer not only apprehends "what the picture expresses" in isolation from any other information, but also may equate what is observed and felt with what it "expresses."²²⁰ Hodgson's writings prioritize the self-sufficiency of the pictorial surface and measures the value of a work of art as independent and autonomous from any representative associations with the natural world, or, in correspondence to Greenberg's assertions in *Life*—the primacy of the direct aesthetic experience.

One year after Luke's exhibition, William Ronald arranged the *Abstracts At Home* show [Fig. 16], which took place in October 1953 at the Simpson's Department Store in Toronto as part of a display of home furnishings and interior decoration. Held on the fifth floor of the Simpson's Home Furnishings section, *Abstracts at Home* featured the paintings of seven artists as complementary visual focal points to modern as well as traditional bedroom, living room, and dining room settings. Ronald, then employed as a commercial artist in the display section of the store, described the aim of the show as an attempt "to persuade the general public that this form of contemporary expression in painting was as much at home within surroundings of everyday living as in an art gallery."²²¹ In one model room, Hodgson's paintings *Close Up* (1953) and *Blue Lamp* (1953) were hung in a living room setting, alongside a "traditional" three-piece sofa set and mahogany coffee table, while in another, Cahén's *Candy Tree* is demonstrated to be

²²⁰ Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison and Mel Ramsden, "Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation," *Art History* 4:4 (December 1981): 432–456.

²²¹ William Ronald, "Abstracts at Home," *Canadian Art* 11:2 (Winter 1954): 52.

“at home” in a modern television room, paired with a “Swedish modern rug” and wrought iron chair.

Painters Eleven formed on the evening following a publicity photograph for *Abstracts at Home* [Fig. 17], when the seven artists included in the show gathered at Luke’s cottage studio in Oshawa to discuss the possibility of establishing a group dedicated to the production and exhibition of non-representational paintings. With plans to hold an official meeting on a subsequent week, four more artists Macdonald, Gordon, Town, and Yarwood were extended an invitation to join the company. At this congregation the group decided to name themselves Painters Eleven, a numerically-based designation which, according to Town, was originally suggested in order to “facilitate the addition of new artists and the resignation of original members (if they so wished).”²²² This idea of being a transmutable association was quickly abandoned “in favour of remaining small, fluid, autonomous, and in fact nothing more than a mechanism for showing [their] pictures economically without the burden of a charter constitution et al.”²²³

The *Abstracts at Home* publicity picture of Painters Eleven in its embryonic stage bears a striking, and not altogether coincidental, similarity to *Life* magazine’s now-iconic photograph of the Irascibles [Fig. 18]— particularly in the formal staging and professional self-consciousness evident in both images.²²⁴ When *Life* magazine published

²²² Harold Town, “Rough drafts of P11 beginnings,” unpublished essay, n.d., MG30 D404, Volume 32, File 4, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ “Irascible Group of Advanced Artists Led Fight Against Show,” *Life*, January 15, 1951; see also Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*.

the story on January 15, 1951, it was accompanied by a photograph of the artists taken by Nina Leen. The Irascibles understood the stakes of staging and controlling of their own self-image in the photograph. Dressed in suits and ties, the painters wanted to be photographed as professionals, or “like bankers” as Barnett Newman insisted, in order to counteract the popular image of artists as lackadaisical bohemians or as anarchic rebels.²²⁵ In his biography of Mark Rothko, James E. B. Breslin notes that, with their collective glare and stiff, business-like body language, the Irascibles appeared “too respectable to be threateningly avant-garde” yet “too grim and intense to be merely bourgeois,” and thus they projected “an image of respectable individuality which allows them to enter both the middle-class and the mass media without being absorbed by them.”²²⁶

In the *Abstracts at Home* photograph of Painters Eleven, a comparable self-fashioning is at work which speaks to the overlapping concerns, narratives, and discourses surrounding modern art and artists between these two localities. As the Irascibles protested against conservative juries in the Metropolitan’s contemporary art competition in New York, so too were Painters Eleven producing their own “Irascibles moment” in Toronto against arts societies. Within their own stuffy milieu of “Toronto the Good,” Painters Eleven also had a vested interest in an image of respectability,

²²⁵ Newman, quoted in Bernard Harper Friedman, “The Irascibles: A Split Second in Art History,” *Arts Magazine* 53:1 (September 1978): 97.

²²⁶ James E.B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 273. Breslin also recognizes that *Life*’s readers were primarily middle-class Americans with particular values and mores, and the formal attire in this photograph was an attempt to appeal to these sensibilities.

seriousness, and perhaps even maintaining commensurability with “British dullness.” It is tempting to see the positions that each Painters Eleven member has taken around the central ladder as correlating to those struck by the Irascibles, although Painters Eleven are less intimidating and offer more in the way of a friendly demeanor, especially in the smiles of Luke and Nakamura, both sitting on stools. Barrie Hale, in his analysis this photograph, has also recognized the comical awkwardness of this combination of professionalism and congeniality. Hale notes of the objects present in the picture that the artists are “draped with a kind of forced-formal casualness around a couple of props much in vogue at the time as evocation of the ‘artistic’—a multi-directional drafting lamp and a stepladder.”²²⁷ At the top of the ladder, Hale continues to observe, Ray Mead clutches a handful of paintbrushes in a manner all too unnatural, as though all the artistry had left him.²²⁸ Painters Eleven’s photograph doesn’t match the “grim intensity” or coolness of the Irascibles—it is distilled through the filter of Toronto’s reserved cultural conventions. They are too polished, Hale also argues, and also too self-aware.

As Breslin acknowledges about the strategy involved in the Irascibles photograph, crucial to Painters Eleven’s own discursive position was that they promote themselves not as “anarchic rebels,” but as individuals with respectability to allow them to enter into the surrounding dialogue.²²⁹ Painters Eleven’s strategy here is not too distant from their New York counterparts. Michael Leja has previously pointed out a certain discrepancy between the “strident, belligerent,” and “not to say pompous” tone of the Abstract

²²⁷ Hale, *Out of the Park*, 33.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Breslin, *Mark Rothko*, 273.

Expressionists manifestos and writings—in the Irascibles letter to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example—and the “conservative” substance of their arguments.²³⁰ It is an intriguing reversal of the contradictions within Painters Eleven’s rhetoric and discourse—where the New York artists were verbally antagonistic but reserved in their argument, members of Painters Eleven were reserved in their written articulations but highly antagonistic in their motivations. Both, however, were responding to a perceived discrimination against modern art within their respective institutional systems.²³¹ In another revelation, Bradford R. Collins, in his historiographical analysis of the relationship between *Life* magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, draws from Leja’s observations to argue that the New York artists were more accommodating of the prevailing cultural values of American bourgeois society in the 1940s and 1950s than previous scholarship has suggested, and vice versa.²³² Far from rejecting and creating backlash against these artists, Collins contends, *Life* magazine’s articles from 1947 to the 1950s reveal “tolerance and support for modern art” by attempting to educate its readers about its foundations and methods.²³³ In other words, in New York as in Toronto, the extent to which modern and abstract artists could claim to be marginalized must be properly framed within their respective discursive spaces. The self-curation of Painters

²³⁰ See Michael Leja, “The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York,” in Michael Auping, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1987), 13–33.

²³¹ Notably, Roland L. Redmond, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, denied that such discrimination was occurring.

²³² Collins, “Life and the Abstract Expressionists.”

²³³ *Ibid.*, 285.

Eleven's avant-garde radicalism, based on a "rationalized alienation" and being-in-common against a "shared enemy," is a process that echoed similar developments beyond Toronto.

This early coming together of Painters Eleven in *Abstract at Home* dovetailed well with their self-conceptualization as being in "harmonious disagreement" with the conservatives of the Toronto art world in 1954. In both public image and rhetoric, Painters Eleven crafted a particular identity of avant-gardism that matched the "dull" environment of Toronto, making their stance palatable for their own English-Canadian audiences—even as their internal and private writings reveal a fervor of antagonism and hostility. Although Painters Eleven approached their collaboration as a practical "mechanism" for the purpose of facilitating independent exhibitions, underlying the group's rhetoric of cool detachment or "harmonious disagreement" were passionate convictions about the value of taste and education, progress and modernity, and national cultural identity. These convictions testify to Painters Eleven's internalized self-conceptualization as avant-garde artists within the discursive spaces of modern art and nationalism in Toronto.

Chapter Three: Internationalizing “Harmonious Disagreement” in New York

By 1956, Painters Eleven had gained a significant boost in reputation and public exposure. Their efforts in self-promotion and self-marketing had secured for the group a handful of significant exhibitions that year, including shows at the Roberts Gallery, the Hart House Gallery, and a circulating exhibition which toured the Western Ontario art galleries circuit of nine cities.²³⁴ It was in April 1956, however, that Painters Eleven marked a watershed moment in their exhibition history with their first showing outside of Canada. The group was invited to participate as guest artists of the 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists (AAA) at Riverside Museum in New York City, and exhibited their abstractions alongside works by George L. K. Morris, Ilya

²³⁴ William Ronald spearheaded much of these efforts in self-promotion, although it is unclear whether he was assigned this task during a Painters Eleven meeting or if he was working independently. Ronald wrote a number of letters to galleries in Toronto and Montreal, including the Waldorf Galleries and Galerie Agnès Lefort, which inquired into the galleries' interest in hosting an exhibition of Painters Eleven works. Ronald also wrote to a number of radio stations like CKEY 580 Toronto, CKFH 1400 Toronto, CHUM 1050 Toronto, requesting that they publicize their exhibitions. R2113 Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada. The Western Ontario art galleries circuit was operated by the London Art Museum, and was a regular circuit of nine cities of western Ontario. Hart House in Toronto, The Willistead Gallery in Windsor, and to London, Peterborough, Hamilton, Montreal and Sackville, N.B.

Bolotowsky, Perle Fine, and Louise Bourgeois.²³⁵ Showcasing their paintings in an international art center like New York was a validation of the value and caliber of their work beyond their previous expectations, and for Painters Eleven it was precisely the kind of recognition they had struggled for in their local Toronto.

Giddy anticipation over the Riverside Museum show with the AAA had Painters Eleven “all bubbling over with an inner glow,” and “with confidence in their worth.”²³⁶ A photograph from the opening night of the exhibition [Fig. 19] features four Painters Eleven members who were able to travel south to attend the celebration, accompanied by the vice consul of the Canadian consulate and the director of the Riverside Museum, Nettie S. Horch, gathered together in front of Tom Hodgson’s *Object Detail* (1956) and Harold Town’s *Tug at One*.²³⁷ The show also included Hodgson’s *It Became Green* (1956) [Fig. 20], Jack Bush’s *Reflection*, Hortense Gordon’s *The Derelict*, and Jock Macdonald’s *White Bark* [Fig. 21]. The paintings were carefully selected, as the success of this exhibition would be a crucial step in cementing Painters Eleven’s self-image as avant-garde “rebels” in their national and their potential international reputations.²³⁸

²³⁵ Exhibition pamphlet, *American Abstract Artists: 20th Annual Exhibition with ‘Painters Eleven’ of Canada, April 8–May 20, 1956* (New York: Riverside Museum, 1956), n.p.

²³⁶ Correspondence Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, n.d., R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

²³⁷ Bob Cowans, photograph of the opening of the 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists, New York, 1956. From left: Jock Macdonald, M.B. Kesslerling (vice consul, Canadian consulate), Nettie S. Horch (director, Riverside Museum, New York), Alexandra Luke, Jack Bush, Helen Ronald, and William Ronald.

²³⁸ “Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan,” *Time Canada*, May 7, 1956, p.38.

These paintings represented their “highest quality” and most “controversial” abstract artworks, in order to meet the criteria of “good painting” set by AAA president Henry Botkin in accordance with the evaluative standards of the AAA. As their first appearance across international borders, the show was a strategic positioning of the group that involved the marketing and branding of themselves as Toronto’s avant-garde, as well as their specific platform of “harmonious disagreement”—they would not outright condemn conservative painters back in Toronto, but they would use this achievement as evidence of their vanguardism.

For all their excitement about an international breakthrough, however, Painters Eleven were on the backfoot of the latest developments in New York. They were unaware of the tensions that had been brewing among different factions of abstract artists in the city since the early 1940s, when artists like Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko were setting forth new parameters for American art that were expressly against the AAA’s institutionalized style, and when art critics like Clement Greenberg were also unenthusiastic about its stagnating aesthetics.²³⁹ Founded in 1936, the AAA were well-established in New York by the time Painters Eleven were invited to join their 1956 exhibition—so much so that by the 1950s the AAA were old hat, and no longer representing the freshest and most relevant artistic experiments of the day. The AAA were being replaced by the Abstract Expressionists who, with no formal arrangement or

²³⁹ See Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 75–76; and Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall, the American Abstract Artists, the League of Present Day Artists, and Ivan Mestrovic,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 143–146.

grouping of their own, were being championed by Greenberg as the new avant-garde.²⁴⁰ That Painters Eleven's "highest quality" work was sought after by the AAA poses a problem to the group's claims to English-Canadian vanguardism—if their most "controversial" abstractions aligned with New York's rearguard aesthetics, what exactly was Painters Eleven's position in an international artworld? Were Painters Eleven's best artworks still "namby-pamby" in 1956?

This chapter explores two sets of contradictions and frictions in Painters Eleven's group identity as they emerged in association with the Riverside Museum exhibition. By looking closely at the 1956 event, I examine how this exhibition shifted and complicated relationships that Painters Eleven held not just among themselves within the group, but also within the Toronto milieu and the New York scene. I posit that, despite their lack of knowledge of the complexities of the politics of abstract art and "modern art" in New York, the AAA show allowed Painters Eleven to maintain a self-perception of avant-gardism by performing their outward ideology of "harmony" on two primary discursive levels. On one level, introduced in Chapter Two, the idea of "harmony" acted as a manufactured construction of social unity, functioning as the discursive force which originally bound the eleven individuals together and preserving their status as an avant-garde movement during their years of activity and beyond. Second, and intertwined with the first, "harmony" can also be understood as a key component of an aesthetic philosophy which, forged out of twentieth-century modernism's visual ideology of universality and progress, yields the perception of *aesthetic* unity and a common modernist vision. Both operations serve to mask the tensions and inconsistencies present

²⁴⁰ Greenberg, "The Present Prospects," 167.

in Painters Eleven's historiography and painting. By grouping themselves together under the rhetoric of "modernism" and "harmony," Painters Eleven were the source of their own mythological status in English Canada.

The Ideology of Harmonious Disagreement

Jock Macdonald described the impact that the New York show had on Painters Eleven's spirits as a "cheerful zest" that strengthened the bond of the group with "what now appears to be a friendly faith in each other."²⁴¹ Macdonald observed that they seemed "much more united than they were two years ago."²⁴² The implication in this statement is telling—it suggests that their discursively cohesive trait of "harmony" was, despite the confidence of their written rhetoric and non-manifestos, quite tenuous as a socially or artistically binding force. Three years had passed since their initial meeting in 1953. In those years, Painters Eleven maintained their original function as a "practical mechanism."²⁴³ Their activities as a group were limited to formal meetings where discussion focused on business-oriented agenda items, including potential shows and venues, upcoming expenses, shipping logistics, and other administrative details, as well

²⁴¹ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 10 June 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Harold Town, "Rough drafts of P11 beginnings," n.d., unpublished essay, MG30 D404, Volume 32, File 4, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

as group votes on such exhibition-related decisions.²⁴⁴ “We were dispersive, we were not tightly interactionary,”²⁴⁵ Town explains. According to Town, members saw very little of each other outside of group meetings, although “a slight sense of community” was still maintained among them.²⁴⁶ Painters Eleven meetings were frequently the site of clashes between more outspoken members—Bush’s recollection to art historian J. Russell Harper puts forth an example of a “vicious and loud” argument being led by the antagonistic Town, who turns to the “ineffably calm” Nakamura for a contribution only to be met with the simple reply that Nakamura “liked apples”²⁴⁷—who had differing points of view on the direction and tone of their exhibitions. Entries in Luke’s meeting notes suggest that such gatherings were belligerent, with excessive drinking of alcohol and “revolting” swearing and impolite language that “made her sick.”²⁴⁸ One particularly boisterous and rowdy meeting lasted well past 11:15pm, when Luke decided to leave. “Must try and avoid meetings in future,” Luke wrote as a reminder to herself afterwards.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Alexandra Luke’s personal Painters Eleven meeting notes, Box 1, File 1, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

²⁴⁵ Harold Town, interviewed by Joan Murray, February 11, 1979, typed transcript, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada, pg. 17.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Correspondence from Jack Bush to J. Russell Harper, quoted in Iris Nowell, *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art*, 297. Harold Town refers to Nakamura as “ineffably calm” in a transcribed interview with Joan Murray. Town, interviewed by Joan Murray, February 11, 1979, typed transcript, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada, pg. 17.

²⁴⁸ Alexandra Luke’s personal Painters Eleven meeting notes, 27 February 1958, Box 1, File 1, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Riverside Museum photograph reveals both the excitement and the unease of the group in this important moment, where their achievement was both a galvanizing validation of their work as well as a daunting opportunity to craft and secure their international image as significant artists. Macdonald and Ronald, on either end of the huddle in the picture, adopt personas of composed, self-assured artists as they gaze at the camera with a casual turn of the head and the barest trace of a grin, exuding an air of confident authenticity to match that of the vice consul and museum director, both to the right of Macdonald. Undermining this nonchalance are Luke and Bush, squeezed into the center of the huddle with much less grace. Bush's unreserved, toothy smile is a marked contrast to Luke's timid expression as she pulls in her shoulders and grips her handbag while Bush edges his shoulder in front of hers. The way that Bush and Luke are pressed together is noticeable within the awkward framing of the photograph—to Macdonald's right, in front of Town's painting, is an empty space big enough for the group to spread out evenly, but Bush and Luke can hardly find space to move.

This photograph may be read as representative of the constant tensions between Painters Eleven's external image and internal relations. While their surface agitations are a commonplace and unremarkable occurrence within such large group dynamics, in the case of Painters Eleven this opens a pathway of inquiry which reveals that incongruity runs deeper in their grouping. Strained oscillations between friction and fellowship, conflict and compatibility form part of a complex series of contradictions and paradoxes which are at the very crux of Painters Eleven's "harmonious" group identity. This is to say that the foundational concept of "harmony" for Painters Eleven is not a pre-existing essence but rather a manufactured ideology which allows the group to operate under a

perceived illusion of togetherness. Unity in this sense is a performance, and one that is being enacted in the Riverside Museum photograph. Their fraught internal dynamics reveal that Painters Eleven are not bound together by a natural or essential harmony but rather that their community is contingent and circumscribed around the overall interest in constructing harmony as an idea or outward projection.

One of the contradictions inherent in Painters Eleven's self-conceptualization is located in their core commitment to "harmonious disagreement." To unravel the paradox of how Painters Eleven can be simultaneously "harmonious" yet also in "disagreement," one must acknowledge and situate their inauguration as a primarily socially-driven enterprise, a prioritization of a "shared interest" in the dismantling of an enemy.²⁵⁰ As I argue in Chapter Two, Painters Eleven were clear to situate themselves as a collective in opposition to predominantly traditional attitudes towards art production in Canada. By mobilizing "harmonious disagreement," Painters Eleven established "harmony" as a force which secured their community, or "contingent being-together," as Jean-Luc Nancy has called it, and defined this "being-together" against a common enemy.²⁵¹ As such "harmony" can be understood as an ideological formation which obscures the actuality of Painters Eleven's internal tensions and often uncooperative interactions. Since ideology in general, as Louis Althusser theorizes, conceals the contradictions by constructing an imaginary coherence of an individual's relationships to the world, then "harmony," in

²⁵⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. See also Chapter Two.

²⁵¹ Ibid. See also Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, "Introduction: Communities of Sense," in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Beth Hinderliter, et. al., (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1–30.

creating a binding unity between eleven individuals on this socio-historical level, offers just such an illusion, manufacturing for Painters Eleven an identity of cohesion and compatibility.²⁵²

This framework is critical for understanding how Painters Eleven, as one such paradoxically produced collective, can be in “harmonious disagreement.” Their grouping as English-Canada’s midcentury modernists is not predicated on their shared, pre-existing nature as vanguard individuals, but rather is contingent upon the exterior circumstances of Toronto’s cultural milieu in the 1950s. The idea of “harmonious disagreement” was born out of Painters Eleven’s position within the context of a Toronto where “conservatives rule the roost,”²⁵³ and while its proclamation acknowledges the presence of a social conflict with art academies, Painters Eleven’s non-manifesto continues to maintain the structure of the group’s relationships, allowing for the eleven individuals to operate, however thinly, as a perceived cohesive unit without exposing the contradictions within. This ideology is enacted in the Riverside Museum photograph on the seemingly trivial level of internal social dynamics. For Althusser, ideology is materialized in the social world through its practice and through actions which are performed by individuals to affirm their imaginary relationship to the world.²⁵⁴ In the photograph, “harmony” is

²⁵² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *On Ideology: Radical Thinkers* (London: Verso, 1984), 1–60. See also Nicos Hadjinicolaou, “Art History and Class Struggle,” in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (London: Paul Chapman, The Open University), 243–248.

²⁵³ Lawrence Campbell, “Canadian Painters Eleven,” *Art News* 55:3 (May 1956): 50.

²⁵⁴ Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

manifested in the appearance of their group unity at the Riverside Museum, concealing the fraught relationships between group members under the ideological umbrella of “harmony.” The ideology of the avant-garde and the grouping of “harmony” serves to naturalize what is actually historically contingent.

Within the larger stakes of this dissertation, “harmony” serves as a framework which allows us to explore the ideological and artistic complexities that define midcentury Canadian modernism. Unravelling the threads of “harmony” reveals this modernism to be an attempt to mediate or reconcile the universalizing convictions of international abstraction with the increasingly urgent concern for national specificity in the wake of the Second World War. This approach also facilitates nuanced perspectives on Painters Eleven’s placement within the narrative of twentieth century Canadian art history by opening a critical analysis of the group’s historiography. Uncovering how their self-conceptualization and self-professionalization determined their ideologically coherent identity as made concrete in press reception, what is revealed is that historiographical scholarship is complicit in maintaining the avant-garde identity produced by Painters Eleven themselves.

Beyond its function as an ideological construction of avant-garde cohesion, however, “harmony” carries an additional layer of significance for Painters Eleven and Canadian modernism. On this level, the term “harmony” also bears meaning as an artistic philosophy through which the formal and aesthetic concerns of modern art were explored and negotiated by Painters Eleven. Members of the group often appropriated ideas from influential modernist art-critical models which emphasized and prioritized qualities of art that were commensurate with general connotations of the word “harmony”—broadly

speaking, “harmony” is often associated with qualities such as balance, wholeness, order, unity, and pleasurability—and integrated these ideas into their practice. What I suggest is that the notion of “harmony” can not only be understood as a key approach to the question of aesthetic expression in this period of modernist art practice and theory, but also that this very approach underscores Painters Eleven’s overall artistic strategies and philosophies, while allowing for the group’s internal tensions between unity and diversity to coexist in contradiction.

If Painters Eleven’s group identity cannot be fixed by a social or political homogeneity, but rather must be circumscribed around a certain set of pro-modern attitudes which denounce the regressiveness of figurative art, then the motivations for their distinct individual practices are difficult to account for. “Harmony” as an ideological structure layered with both social and aesthetic significance, however, provides Painters Eleven with the fictitious cohesion necessary in order to maintain their avant-garde collectivity, or *being-in-common*. An assessment of the parameters of “harmony”—examined as the thread of aesthetic approach and perspective which aids in the production of Painters Eleven’s imagined collectivity—will be carried out in Chapter Five. Operating within this larger framework, “harmony” is an ideological formation which serves to obscure the rather nebulous, unrooted, and idiosyncratic character of Painters Eleven’s assemblage of artistic philosophies.

Toronto Abstraction in New York

Painters Eleven were careful to feature only the very best of their works in New York. It was, as they understood it, crucial for their self-image as well as their national

and potential international reputations to be recognized as successful avant-garde “rebels.”²⁵⁵ It also reveals the contingent nature of their collectivity and *being-in-common*. Ronald was especially invested in the Riverside exhibition as an opportunity for Painters Eleven to seize the spotlight of abstract art in Canada from Montreal’s Jean-Paul Riopelle and Paul-Emile Borduas, which Ronald makes clear in his correspondence with Bush in the weeks leading up to the show. “Apparently,” Ronald writes, “some of them [members of AAA] are...leery of a Canadian show. With remarks as, ‘If you have a Canadian show, why not Borduas or Riopelle?’... Believe me we don’t have to take any back seat to Riopelle, in my estimation or Borduas.”²⁵⁶ In 1954, Ronald had left Toronto and moved to New York to pursue his artistic career, but was still an active member of Painters Eleven. He had been acting as the point of contact between Painters Eleven and AAA president Henry Botkin. The work of Borduas and Riopelle, which had gained a significant foothold in vital art centers like New York and Paris in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had opened a pathway of transnational transmission out of Canada, and Painters Eleven were keen to enter into the flow of postwar modernism by establishing themselves as the avant-garde of contemporary abstract art from Toronto.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ “Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan,” *Time Canada*, May 7, 1956, pp. 38.

²⁵⁶ Correspondence from William Ronald to Jack Bush, n.d., Box 5A, File 12, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

²⁵⁷ For more on Montreal painting during this period, see François-Marc Gagnon, “Québec Painting 1953–56: A Turning Point,” *Artscanada* (February–March 1973): 48–50; Sandra Paikowsky, “Vivre dans la cité: Quebec Abstract Painting,” and Jody Patterson, “Painting on the Edge: Geometric Abstraction in Montreal, the 1950s,” Master’s Thesis: Concordia University, 2001.

The defensive tone in Ronald's words comes as no surprise—it is consistent with the resentment and frustration that characterized much of Painters Eleven's "harmonious disagreement" against their reception in Toronto's stuffy, conservative environment. For Ronald, the comparative remarks made by their American counterparts served as a reminder that international perceptions of Canadian artistic production were being constructed out of an inadequate knowledge of up-to-date, experimental painters. As a mechanism for securing such exhibitions, the group identity of Painters Eleven was crucial to achieving any manner of international reputation. With their first show beyond Canadian borders, however, Painters Eleven also faced their first challenge—whether their social platform of *harmony* could be sustained, affirmed, and vindicated by the aesthetic character of their painting as judged by what Painters Eleven considered to be a more authoritative position. In New York, the eleven artists now encountered a certain set of expectations and criteria for the quality of their work, and the prospect of evaluative assessment and criticism in a city where abstraction was by the mid 1950s already becoming institutionalized through major art galleries, dealers, and critics.

It appears that AAA's president Botkin was particular about Painters Eleven's ability to match the strength of the paintings to be exhibited by the AAA. Relaying this message to Bush, Ronald warns that:

[Botkin] keeps insisting that it be a show of the highest quality and as contro[versial] as possible. No watercolours and all abstract. No landscape to the extent of Nak's [Nakamura's] stuff in our last show. We must insist on this...Botkin said and as we all know the success of

the group show is dependent not only on good painting but contrasting color, proportion etc...²⁵⁸

As the letter continues, Ronald reveals that he himself was concerned not only with keeping up with the caliber of the exhibition but also with matching, in their mental disposition, the highly competitive tenor of New York's artistic milieu:

He [Botkin] felt as this sort of thing has never happened to Canadians before that we should go as far as is financially possible [on the publicity and exhibition statement]. Regarding this I would suggest a lot of thinking. We are not dealing with a Toronto audience here and they can cut you to ribbons if you tend to get precious.²⁵⁹

Botkin's stipulations are clear in their presupposition that abstract painting's "quality" is affixed to the full erasure of representational references to real world phenomena—and especially any trace of their national landscape idiom. Part of the visual character of abstract art as defined within a milieu of painting in New York, it seems, included its ability to elicit controversy and discussion, and to play the role of avant-garde radicality through the mobilization of serious inquiries into the self-sufficiency and autonomy of painting.

²⁵⁸ Correspondence from William Ronald to Jack Bush, n.d., Box 5A, File 12, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Even so, Botkin's "quality" here must not be conflated with, or interpreted as, a set of aesthetic standards set by Clement Greenberg's Abstract Expressionism or Harold Rosenberg's Action Painting, which is to say, specific readings of modern painting's "self-critical tendency" and gestural indexicality as canonized by the two respective critics.²⁶⁰ While the categories of gestural and colorfield painting are now authoritative within the critical art history of New York modernism,²⁶¹ they were by no means constitutive of an exclusive framework of meaning in the 1950s, and nor were they connected to the AAA's artistic platform, which had been defined as simply "uniting

²⁶⁰ Although Clement Greenberg did not fully theorize the term "self-criticality" until 1960 in his essay "Modernist Painting," where he uses "self-criticism" to refer to flatness as the "essence of Modernism" which he argues "lies...in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence," this idea has come to serve as an essential element in Modernist ideology because of its absorption of the concepts of self-sufficiency and autonomy. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²⁶¹ Texts that have addressed, critiqued, and problematized these mythological categories include, for example, David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism and the Cultural Logic of Romantic Anti-Capitalism: Dissent during the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*; Guilbaut, ed., *Reconstructing Modernism*; Nancy Jachec, *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*.

abstract artists residing in the United States.”²⁶² At the Riverside exhibition, Painters Eleven’s works were not judged in relation to either classification, and Botkin’s stipulation of “quality” was unaffixed to any specific technique or visual appearance of abstraction. Rather, “quality” could be represented by a diverse range of approaches, providing that they adhered to the defining and exclusive factor of non-figuration. Within the complexities of the developing New York scene, however, the AAA was known for its specifically European aesthetic, a mode of internationalism that followed the lead of abstraction set by European artists like Piet Mondrian and Picasso.²⁶³ Internationalism in this sense had to do with relinquishing American specificity, and using the language of French modernism to transcend regionalism and nationalism.²⁶⁴ Greenberg, too, was invested in Cubism, but the art critic argued that contemporary American painters could not just appropriate the style. They needed, according to Greenberg, to “completely assimilate” the lessons of French art, and to assert an originality that makes it their own.²⁶⁵ In his 1947 essay “The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture,” Greenberg argues that Jackson Pollock’s paintings did precisely that.²⁶⁶

²⁶² Preface to the AAA Second Annual Exhibition catalogue, New York, 1938, quoted in “AAA Historical Outline by Esphyr Slobodkina,” American Abstract Artists, 2004–2018, <http://americanabstractartists.org/history/aaa-historical-outline-by-esphyr-slobodkina/>.

²⁶³ See Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 36–37, 56. See also Hubert F. Van den Berg, and Lidia Gluchowska, eds., *Transnationality, Internationalism, and Nationhood: European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Leuven, Paris, and Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2013).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶⁵ Greenberg, “The Present Prospects,” 167.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Founded in 1936, the AAA was an arts society dedicated to the production and exhibition of abstract art, and whose aim was to provide artists working within a range of styles a space for dialogue and exhibition.²⁶⁷ The fact that Painters Eleven's first and only group exhibition in the United States was in partnership with an arts society is significant. As a successful grouping of exclusively abstract artists celebrating its twentieth year anniversary in 1956, the AAA was a near perfect foil to the conservative arts societies of Toronto whose disavowal of "modern art" had prompted the very formation of Painters Eleven. These similarities were so compelling that Luke considered the AAA to be the exemplar of the possibilities for growth and development in painting in Canada, and even referenced the AAA as a source of inspiration for group exhibitions of abstract art in her opening speech for the 1952 YWCA *Canadian Abstract Exhibition*.²⁶⁸ Luke also pondered the suitability of pursuing an "Abstract Canadian Group" to keep up with the American society.²⁶⁹ From the vantage point of Toronto, where art societies controlled the scene, the existence of an established institution dedicated to abstract painting would have seemed to Painters Eleven like a remarkable, radical feat in itself. In their eyes, the AAA was an organization to admire, because it represented progress for modern art and a

²⁶⁷ Susan C. Larsen, "The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History 1936–1941," *Archives of American Art Journal* 14:1 (1974): 2–7.

²⁶⁸ Transcript of notes from Alexandra Luke's speech for the opening of the *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* at the Sackville Art Association, 23 March 1953, Box 3A, File D, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada. See also Chapter Two.

²⁶⁹ Correspondence from Alexandra Luke to Lawren P. Harris, 18 November 1952, Box 3A, File D, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

great step forward that had not yet taken place in their own stuffy city. However, Painters Eleven were quite unaware that in the complicated milieu of New York painting, the AAA did not represent the latest developments in abstraction.

Much like Painters Eleven, the AAA had been formed in order to affirm and exhibit abstract painting in the United States. The necessity for artists to self-organize around the commonality of non-figuration was thus not a circumstance confined only to Toronto, or even Canada. Just as Painters Eleven felt that all-abstract exhibitions—where the principal visual facets, as well as the possible differences in technique and application, of abstraction could be clearly observed—were a key mode of educating the layman, so too did the AAA assert that part of their purpose was “to bring before the public their individual works, and in every possible way foster public appreciation for this direction in painting and sculpture.”²⁷⁰ While it has been suggested that the AAA “established a suitable climate for the formation of Abstract Expressionism” during its “heyday” from 1936 to 1942,²⁷¹ the diversity of techniques present in the 1956 Riverside Museum exhibition is a testament to the AAA’s mission of uniting abstraction’s range of styles. According to Ilene Susan Fort, the members of AAA usually worked in geometric,

²⁷⁰ Preface to the AAA Second Annual Exhibition catalogue, New York, 1938, quoted in “AAA Historical Outline by Esphyr Slobodkina.”

²⁷¹ This has been suggested by Ilene Susan Fort in “American Abstract Artists,” in *The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art, Volume 1*, ed. Joan M. Marter (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89; and by Susan C. Larsen, in “The American Abstract Artists.” The connection between AAA and Abstract Expressionism, however, is severely lacking in study, and an inquiry into these claims are beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more on the AAA’s history, see G. McNeil, “American Abstractionists Venerable at Twenty,” *Art News* 3 (1956) 34–35, 64–66.

Cubist-derived aesthetics with hard-edged forms and flat planes of colors, similar to the Abstraction-Création group of artists formed in Paris in 1931. Although its members tended towards geometric abstraction and even the neo-plasticism of Mondrian, officially, the only requirement for AAA paintings is that the mode abstraction be “distinguished from those efforts characterized by expressionism, realistic representation, surrealism, etc.”²⁷²—that is, there must be a rejection of all forms of figuration, free even from early-twentieth-century distortions of representational imagery.

The AAA laid claim to New York’s avant-garde in the 1930s, and thought of themselves as avant-garde in 1940, when they picketed the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to protest their exclusion—or at least what they perceived to be their exclusion—from its exhibitions, claiming that the MoMA’s April 1940 program *Italian Masters*, which featured seventeenth-century painters like Caravaggio and Bronzino, was a betrayal of the institution’s commitment to modern art.²⁷³ By the mid 1940s, however, the AAA’s dedication to European internationalism was growing tiresome for art critics like Greenberg, who felt that the AAA, in their pastiches of the French and Dutch styles of Cubism and Neoplasticism lacked a intensity or unique qualities of their own. In his review of the AAA’s 1947 exhibition, Greenberg wrote: “Here the hand of the past descends more heavily because none of the thirty-seven artists represented can quite boast a temperament. Some of them have an abundance of vitality, at least of a mechanical kind, but nowhere does it break through the canonical modes of the School of

²⁷² Preface to the AAA Second Annual Exhibition catalogue, New York, 1938, quoted in “AAA Historical Outline by Esphyr Slobodkina.”

²⁷³ See Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?*, 181–182.

Paris to assert a new independent personality—or an idea.”²⁷⁴ For Greenberg, even the French masters who had innovated these groundbreaking styles of art in the 1910s were experiencing a “decline” in the quality of their work, including Picasso, Joan Miró, Fernand Léger, and Marc Chagall.²⁷⁵ Greenberg’s essay, “The Decline of Cubism,” printed in *Partisan Review* in March 1948, was rebutted by George L. K. Morris, who was also a writer for *Partisan Review* and, as an abstract artist himself, served as president of the AAA for a number of years in the 1940s.²⁷⁶ It was in this essay, as well as in the “The Situation at the Moment,” that Greenberg made the “bombshell” declaration that art in New York had not just challenged, but had overtaken the cultural supremacy of France, supplanting Paris as the new center of Western art and culture.²⁷⁷

By the time Painters Eleven were invited to exhibit with them in 1956, the AAA no longer represented a significant part of the advancements in abstract painting in New York. As their exposure to contemporary experiments outside of Canada were mostly filtered through the pages of *Life* and *Canadian Art*, with the occasional in-person visits to the city, Painters Eleven had little knowledge of the nuances and complexities involved in the scene. Still, the Riverside Museum opportunity warranted careful consideration by the group, since it coincided very closely with a number of additional Painters Eleven

²⁷⁴ Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall,” 143–146.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., see also Greenberg, “The Decline of Cubism,” in O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg, Volume 2*, 211–215.

²⁷⁶ See Greenberg, “The Decline of Cubism,” and Greenberg, “Reply to George L. K. Morris,” in O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg, Volume 2*, 242–248. For an account of the exchange between Greenberg and Morris, see Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 71–75.

²⁷⁷ Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 172.

exhibitions being held in Canada that year. *Small Pictures by Painters II* opened at the Roberts Gallery, Toronto from February to March and featured works in watercolor, print, collage, and ink on paper, all “abstract in technique to be uniform with [their] other shows.”²⁷⁸ Another show, *Painters Eleven* at the Hart House Gallery, Toronto opened on March 4, 1956.²⁷⁹ This required Painters Eleven to finalize their selection decisions for the Riverside show by February of 1956, and Nakamura, after viewing the Hart House show, comments in a letter to Ronald dated February 28 that, although the Hart House paintings were “well hung” and “look[ed] quite impressive,” “we all” in Toronto “agree that paintings going to New York are much better.”²⁸⁰ In their minds, this meant that their images were on par with New York painting as they had encountered and understood it from Toronto.

Based on this limited exposure, Painters Eleven might have assumed that all New York painting was of an Abstract Expressionist aesthetic, while being unaware that the AAA’s membered tended towards more geometric abstraction tendencies. As a result, they would have felt that their paintings for the Riverside Museum were “much better” because they were up to scratch with the formal openness, aggressiveness, and scale of Abstract Expressionism, while the paintings and watercolors exhibited in Toronto remained on the reserved, small side. Bush later recalled that it had taken Painters Eleven years to be “bold enough” to consider “that Kline, de Kooning, Pollock were even closer”

²⁷⁸ Correspondence from Kazuo Nakamura to William Ronald, 19 February 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

²⁷⁹ Woods, *A History of Painters Eleven*.

²⁸⁰ Correspondence from Kazuo Nakamura to William Ronald, 28 February 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

to their mode of aesthetic expression than they previously thought.²⁸¹ For Bush, the exhibition with the AAA forged a real connection between the two sets of artists, even though the AAA were definitively not on the same artistic plane as Kline, de Kooning, or Pollock. Bush considered the New York show to be: “the first physical contact with kindred spirits outside our own parish, or country, for that matter. This sparked the possibility that we lowly Canadians somehow had a real challenge, and a job to do as artists not at all like the local pattern so prevalent for so many years.”²⁸² Provincial anxiety surfaces in Bush’s comments, a reminder that for Painters Eleven, New York held the cultural authority over Toronto, and by that marker alone, the Riverside exhibition was viewed as a successful validation of their work.

The size disparity between typical Toronto abstractions and New York Abstract Expressionist canvases was one of the major differences between the two cities’ artistic production. This came to light during the Riverside exhibition. For instance, in Ronald's *Drumbeat*, at 47 x 50in, and Hodgson's tall but narrow *It Became Green*, at 96 x 40in, were among the largest canvases to be exhibited, and even so they were both notably smaller than the canvases of many Abstract Expressionists, including for example Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* (1950), with dimensions of 105 x 207in, and Franz Kline's *Mahoning* (1956), 80 x 100.5in. Before 1955, Painters Eleven’s artworks did not often exceed 50 inches in width or length. This difference in scale did not go unnoticed by Ronald, who noted that “actually none of us paint large by N.Y.

²⁸¹ Correspondence from Jack Bush to Russell Harper, c. 1966, quoted in McKaskell, “Changing Academies,” 28.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

standards as some of their stuff fills a whole wall.”²⁸³ Part of the reason for this contrast were practical, a result of size restrictions imposed by Canada’s modest exhibition venues in contrast to New York’s large gallery spaces. The difference in scale, however, is a point of crucial difference in the subjective or formal content of the painting. As McKaskell has argued, size “determines the nature of the painter’s mark on the canvas, a crucial element for understanding the content of gestural painting.”²⁸⁴

When AAA’s president Botkin stipulated “quality,” however, it probably did not refer to Abstract Expressionism specifically, but I venture that Painters Eleven would have considered their work to be bold, assertive, and large enough to match its energy. It is also unclear whether Ronald’s advisory regarding “quality,” which was in correspondence with Bush, was relayed to the rest of Painters Eleven, and even less clear is how much weight this message might have carried when deciding which of their paintings to include in the exhibition. This is evident in the Riverside exhibition pamphlet [Fig. 22], where Kazuo Nakamura’s *White Landscape* (1953) [Fig. 23] is listed, despite Ronald’s “insistence” that “no landscape to the extent of Nak’s stuff in our last show”²⁸⁵ be included in New York. Ronald’s attempt to curate Painters Eleven’s show is indicative once again of the Painters Eleven’s lack of cohesion, as their process of selection and curation, and whether final decisions were typically determined individually or in group or studio consultations, remains ambiguous. However, this insertion of selection criteria

²⁸³ Correspondence from William Ronald to Jack Bush, quoted in McKaskell, “Changing Academies,” 27.

²⁸⁴ McKaskell, “Changing Academies,” 27.

²⁸⁵ Correspondence from William Ronald to Jack Bush, n.d., c.1956, Box 5A, File 12, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

for the Riverside Museum show was highly unusual. As a practical mechanism, Painters Eleven was “just a vehicle for planning exhibitions,” as Nakamura put it—Painters Eleven was not a bohemian artistic community where individuals shared and discussed their techniques or artworks.²⁸⁶ According to Hodgson, offering critiques or opinions about each other’s works was simply not a part of Painters Eleven’s program. Hodgson has stated that each member acted independently, and concerned themselves with their own painting—“it was their business what they did and no one ever say anything about anybody else’s work.”²⁸⁷

Each member of Painters Eleven sent two works to New York. The range of approaches to abstraction represented by Painters Eleven—from the biomorphic, cellular-like structures which crowd the canvas in Tom Hodgson’s *It Became Green* (1956) [Fig. 20], to the explosive, kinetic brushwork and intensified red, black, and white palette of Ronald’s *Drumbeat* (1956) [Fig. 24] and *Central Black* (1956) [Fig. 25], to the fluid

²⁸⁶ Nakamura was especially “indifferent” about “the whole grouping process,” remarking in a 1979 interview with Joan Murray that he “didn’t feel anything about the meetings, [whether] they were exciting or helpful, just a vehicle for planning exhibitions.” Kazuo Nakamura, interviewed by Joan Murray, 12 June 1979, typed transcript, Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

²⁸⁷ Tom Hodgson, in conversation with Joan Murray, 11 September 1990, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, typed transcript, Tom Hodgson File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Canada. The lack of internal critique was true for Painters Eleven as a whole, since the eleven artists were not personally connected, although for particular pairings—like Macdonald and Ronald, for example, whose mentor-student relationship gave them a more intimate connection, or Town and Cahén, who were close friends—studio visits may have been more common.

manipulations of black ink and negative space which produce a spatial field akin to landscape in Nakamura's *White Landscape*—were a match for a similar range of aesthetics represented by the AAA's paintings. A diverse set of artworks were put forth by the American painters—for instance, Perle Fine's *Thundering Rhythms*, George L. K. Morris' *Space Recession*, and Ilya Bolotowsky's *Grey Diamond* [Figs. 26–28]. The contributions made by Fine, Morris, and Bolotowsky confirm that Botkin's notion of “quality” did not require an adherence to any explicit or distinct practice, technique, or school of abstraction as a New York standard, but rather referred to a non-objectivity based around structured composition of basic geometric explorations.

Holubizky has previously noted that most of Painters Eleven's exhibitions received little critical attention, and the Riverside Museum was no exception.²⁸⁸ *Art News* and *Time Canada* published brief, single-column notices of the show, but with minimal significant or knowledgeable content. This is due in part to their independence and separation from the Toronto art community as well as their belated or delayed entry into the international world of modernism, as by 1956 their abstractions hardly registered as the “shock of the new” in either Toronto or New York. In fact, both *Art News* and *Time Canada* merely reproduce Painters Eleven's own self-conceptualized perspective and their self-produced mythology of marginalization and alienation. In *Art News*, Lawrence Campbell writes that “the conservatives rule the roost” in Toronto, and that “the public and press climate for modern art is about like that in the United States when the American Abstract Artists were founded twenty years ago”²⁸⁹—a conclusion that Campbell does not

²⁸⁸ Holubizky, *1953*, 19.

²⁸⁹ Lawrence Campbell, “Canadian Painters Eleven,” *Art News* 55:3 (May 1956): 50.

come to on his own but rather receives from an interview with Jock Macdonald.²⁹⁰

Painters Eleven's anti-conservative rhetoric is also replicated in *Time Canada*'s article, which refers to "their [Painters Eleven] own brand of advance-guarde art" against "massive indifference."²⁹¹ Once again, the success of Painters Eleven's self-promotion strategy here is situated in their ability to manipulate their position in print media.

Again, the mythology of Painters Eleven as "advance-guarde" is supplied by the group's own words, and their self-constructed *being-in-common* identity is printed without question—and sometimes without an awareness of the proper terminology "avant-garde"—in press reviews. This level of public exposure, both through the Riverside exhibition and in print media, matched the ambitious plan that Painters Eleven, in seeking success in a "mainstream of modern art," had set for themselves when they first formed.²⁹² With only one international exhibition realized, Bush maintained his air of grandiosity, saying, "we are launched now in big league circles and the rest will be up to us [Painters Eleven] to paint good, and that's all we need worry about."²⁹³ Adding to this

²⁹⁰ Macdonald mentions this meeting with Lawrence Campbell in a letter to William Ronald dated February 17, 1956. In this correspondence, Macdonald incorrectly identifies Campbell as "Leonard Campbell" and refers to him as "associated editor or something with Art News," and an "unbiased critic" who was interested in Painters Eleven. Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 17 February 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

²⁹¹ "Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan," *Time Canada*, May 7, 1956.

²⁹² Barrie Hale, *Toronto Painting: 1953–1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 11.

²⁹³ Correspondence from Jack Bush to William Ronald, 17 June 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

self-congratulatory boasting against “sour grapes”²⁹⁴ in Toronto, Macdonald also adds prematurely that they were “now known very well all across the country” and accepted as “the most important group of painters in the country.”²⁹⁵ These statements reveal a lack of humility among some members which, however unbecoming, is crucial to their avant-garde formulation, as it is the very process of self-inflation that is concealed by their constructed rhetoric and ideology of “harmonious disagreement.” Their boastful attitude is in contradiction with the modest tone so evident in their exhibition materials.²⁹⁶ For Painters Eleven, the Riverside Museum exhibition was proof that their abstractions were not merely provincial imitations, but rather were distinctive and noteworthy on their own, with a quality on par with the most up-to-date New York painting. What they did not know, however, was that their hosts, the AAA, were not the vanguard but the establishment, and that their invitation to participate in the exhibition in 1956 was not necessarily an indication of Painters Eleven’s avant-garde quality.

Compatible Effects

The successful insertion of Painters Eleven’s work into a New York setting was not determined by any Abstract Expressionist or Action Painting qualification, since such a criteria did not exist in the context of their exhibition with the AAA. However, this is not to say that Painters Eleven’s abstractions at the Riverside Museum did not share a

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 10 June 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

²⁹⁶ See also Chapter Two.

visual vocabulary with Abstract Expressionism. In other words, it is not my intention to dismiss Painters Eleven's 1956 artworks, or to label them as "namby-pamby" because of their involvement with the AAA.²⁹⁷ On the contrary, I argue that the paintings exhibited by Painters Eleven in 1956 demonstrate a remarkable advancement in formal articulation and compositional structuring since their inaugural showcase at the Roberts Gallery in 1954. If in the early 1950s Painters Eleven were "namby-pamby," by 1956 they had critically expanded their aesthetic practice in ways that were in fact comparable to New York abstraction. In these developments, Painters Eleven's visual vocabularies reveal a shared critical history of abstraction and an intellectual engagement with the formal characteristics and artistic philosophies strongly affiliated with Abstract Expressionism as well as modern British art, which therefore allowed critics to generate meaning for their painting through these established frameworks. What adjacent or overlapping critical dialogues are at play at this intersection of Toronto and New York abstraction, and is it possible to disentangle Painters Eleven from these competing frameworks? It is difficult and perhaps impossible to position Painters Eleven neatly within a distinct category of visual practice, not only because of their internal disparities—which are smoothed over by the ideological work of "harmony"—but also because such an act of classification produces an external matrix of meaning which, and here I borrow from art historian

²⁹⁷ York Wilson, quoted in "Art May Test Diplomacy of Lord Alexander," *Montreal Daily Star*, March 10, 1951. See also Chapter Two.

Charles Harrison, superficially assembles together “genealogically disparate endeavors [which have] empirically compatible *effects*.”²⁹⁸

Because Painters Eleven maintained a set of aesthetic interests and philosophies which yielded abstract paintings with a comparable visual effect to what is called New York Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting, their work has been readily subsumed and blanketed under these frameworks. These “compatible *effects*” are constituted by way of certain surface articulations and compositional strategies, such as visibly expressive, gestural, or thick impasto brushwork, and the uniform treatment of forms across the canvas or the denial of pictorial hierarchies and fixed viewpoints, which activate an optical similitude between Toronto and New York painting. I propose that Painters Eleven are entangled at a cultural-historical intersection of competing modern painting discourses, rooted in ideas circulated by a network of figures from Harold Rosenberg to Graham Sutherland to Herbert Read, all of which inform the different interpretations of their aesthetic meaning, and all of which are also held in tension with each other without

²⁹⁸ I borrow this phrase from Charles Harrison’s discussion of the transatlantic dialogue of modern painting between New York, Paris, and London, and in particular his analysis of the confusion of terminology and vocabulary used in London to designate different modes of abstraction. Here Harrison references the 1956 exhibition at the Redfern Gallery “Metavisual, Abstract, Tachiste,” a title that, according to Harrison, “testifies to the anxiety with which artists and critics sought a vocabulary to organise genealogically disparate endeavours having empirically compatible *effects*,” citing for example the similar effects produced by Pierre Soulage’s work of the 1950s with Franz Kline’s, and Georges Matthieu’s work of the mid 1940s with Jackson Pollock’s. See Charles Harrison, “Modernism and the ‘Transatlantic Dialogue’” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 224.

resolution. In other words, no single figure or theory can wholly define our understanding of Painters Eleven's visual practices. An intersection of dialogues between American, European, and British ideas are suspended together in Painters Eleven's compositions as commensurate but competing texts—a network of harmonious contradictions. These paintings may be comprehended as intertextual, allowing the viewer to discover not a core origin or meaning hidden within a cultural document, but rather a layered and textured relation of meanings which exist and move within a “network of textual relations.”²⁹⁹

At the Riverside exhibition in 1956, for example, Tom Hodgson's *It Became Green* and William Ronald's *Drumbeat* offered two very different inquiries into non-figuration by Painters Eleven, and yet both paintings produced visual effects “compatible” with Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting while also bearing traces of philosophical and artistic consonance with British modernisms. Hodgson's *It Became Green* is a complete overhaul of the reserved style exhibited by Hodgson's *Hydrant* [Fig. 29] at the Roberts Gallery in 1954. *It Became Green* is a large, 95 x 40 inch oil on canvas which features a field of greens and blues of adjacent shades and tones, fragmented into circular and ovoid forms and the thick contours that enclose them, which are packed tightly and uniformly across the painted surface. This is a careful, controlled composition, structured predominantly by a bounded, oblong-shape motif which, although appearing in

²⁹⁹ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also Julia Kristeva in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) and Roland Barthes, “Theory of the Text,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 2006), 31–47.

various degrees of rotundity and fullness, recur side-by-side in comparable scale, texture, and hue to achieve an overall optical cohesion throughout an otherwise fractured picture plane. While some forms have not been fully contained or encircled—such as the length of darkened teal on the mid-to-bottom left of the canvas, or the stretch of white at bottom right whose upper portion has only just been partitioned—each shape, encircled by black or deep blue boundaries, occupies its own planar space without overlapping, thus producing a sense of two-dimensionality and impeding any illusion of depth. The flatness of the painting is further underscored not only by the vertical orientation of many of the ovoids, which echoes the rectangular shape of the canvas and reproduces its upward directionality, but also by the extension of the field to the very edges of the canvas, where the incomplete forms suggest their lateral continuation beyond the picture’s visible limits.

It Became Green yields an aesthetic proximity, or “compatible *effect*,” to certain tendencies often attributed to Abstract Expressionism. Because of the consistent density of its visual field and its decentralized composition, which offers no focal point or emphasis, may be referred to as an “all-over picture,” a term defined by Greenberg in 1948 as a uniform, anti-hierarchical distribution of forms across the canvas and the denial of visual distinctions or spatial relationships such a figure-ground.³⁰⁰ Hodgson’s careful

³⁰⁰ I refer here to the term “all-over picture” established by Clement Greenberg in his 1948 essay in *The Nation*, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” which defines a composition that is uniform across the surface of a painted canvas, that refuses a hierarchy of figure-ground relationships, refuses also to provide hierarchy by providing any dominant point of interest, or any indication of the canvas’ directional orientation—or, as Greenberg writes, where “uniformity, this dissolution of the picture into sheer texture, sheer sensation, into the accumulation of similar units of sensation... corresponds perhaps to

organization of the ovoid motif levels Hodgson's painting onto its vertical plane as an "all-over" composition. It is this articulation of flatness, which stresses the canvas as a repository for the material presence of paint *as* surface, that also resonates with another of Greenberg's ideas—that of the integrity of the picture plane in modernist painting. Although Greenberg does not coin the term "all-over picture" until 1960, the concept of "integrity" as "the enduring presence of flatness" which makes the viewer "aware of the flatness" of a painting before the viewer becomes "aware of what the flatness contains."

As a distinctly contrasting technique, fellow Painter Eleven William Ronald's *Drumbeat* [Fig. 24] is not a careful composition of motifs, but rather is more compatible with the aggressive brushwork and surface articulation of Action Painting. Ronald's usage of the brush to imprint a sense of movement and kinesis in a dramatic, almost explosive directionality hints strongly at the idea, defined by Rosenberg, that the canvas in Action Painting is "an arena in which to act," an event rather than a picture.³⁰¹ In *Drumbeat*, a central, black pyramidal form appears as a rupture, and the slashes of paint achieve an overall effect of explosive outward expansion against a passive white field, which orients the picture around a spatial configuration of tension between areas of action and reaction, instigation and reception. *Drumbeat* produces an aesthetic

the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been exhausted, that no area or order of expertise is either intrinsically or relatively superior to any other." See Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: Volume 2*, 221–225.

³⁰¹ "Action-painting" is a term coined by Harold Rosenberg in "The American Action Painters," originally published in *ArtNews* 51:8 (December 1952). See also Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in *Tradition of the New* (New York: Rizon Press, 1959), 23–39.

consonance with certain gestural techniques associated with New York artists such as Franz Kline, Sam Francis, and Joan Mitchell, in its semblance of spontaneity and impulse. The correlation between Ronald's expressive quality and Rosenberg's idea of gesture as improvisation was so strongly appended that both Canadian and American critics saw fit to insert Ronald unproblematically into the two dominant American modern painting discourses. One Canadian critic would later write: "we were quick to identify Ronald in those days as something like 'our Action Painter in New York'...[and] American critics...for the most part lumped Ronald with the horde of second-generation Abstract Expressionists and left it at that."³⁰²

While *It Became Green* and *Drumbeat* carry these comparable impressions or concerns with Abstract Expressionism or Action Painting, they also echo another set of philosophies, discursively and historically adjacent but genealogically distinct from New York, which emerge from spheres of English modernist thought. In particular, what is held in tension with the former in *It Became Green* are English artistic and critical interest in the expression of an organic order, which had reached Canada by the 1950s through increased exhibition and publicity of British artists such as Graham Sutherland, and the wide circulation of texts by the influential critic Herbert Read.³⁰³ The foremost

³⁰² Barrie Hale, "From Crisis to Crisis with William Ronald," *Saturday Night* 90:3 (July–August 1975): 21–26.

³⁰³ Karen A. Finlay, "Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 21:1–2 (1994): 43–59. See also Leslie Dawn, "The Britishness of Canadian Art," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*, eds. John O'Brian and Peter White, 193–201 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

advocate of English modern and abstract art, Read's influence after 1945 had spread worldwide as he lectured throughout Europe and the United States, and having established friendships with Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Ben Nicholson, all of whom were admired by Painters Eleven members as foremost experimental contemporary artists. Jock Macdonald, for example, saved Eric Newton's article "The Paintings of Graham Sutherland" printed in the Spring 1952 issue of *Canadian Art* and made a note to himself on the clipping: "Sutherland is probably the only living artist who can be said to have enriched our imaginative perception of nature."³⁰⁴ On a number of occasions, Nakamura expressed his admiration for British artists Ben Nicholson for his design, Matthew Smith for his use of color, and Paul Nash, for his draughtsmanship.³⁰⁵ Ray Mead attended The Slade school of art in London, and was taught by Sutherland before moving to Canada in 1946, and also expressed his interest in Nicholson and Moore.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Cited in Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981), 162. See also Eric Newton "The Paintings of Graham Sutherland," *Canadian Art* (Spring 1952), 116–21.

³⁰⁵ Kazuo Nakamura, interviewed by Joan Murray, n.d., transcript of notes from phone interview; and Nakamura, interviewed by Murray, 12 June 1979, typed transcript, Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

³⁰⁶ Ray Mead, interviewed by Joan Murray, 4 September 1977, Blythe Farm, Fenelon Falls, typed transcript, Ray Mead File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

Read's writings not only dominated British art theory and criticisms during the 1940s, but was also widely read and well-known in Canada.³⁰⁷ He authored a number of books where he advocated for abstraction through the philosophies of Carl Jung as well as anarchism, including *Art and Society* (1939), *The Meaning of Art* (1951), *Contemporary British Art* (1951), and *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (1952).³⁰⁸ In 1958, *Canadian Art* published Read's essay "Recent Tendencies in Abstract Painting," where Read introduces a psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of abstract painting, citing Jung's ideas about how the visual imagination of the unconscious psyche is outwardly manifested to explain the aesthetic forms of abstract painting.³⁰⁹ The essay generated a two-part response against Read's ideas by artist Joseph Plaskett in the

³⁰⁷ Finlay, "Identifying with Nature," 43.

³⁰⁸ For further analysis of Herbert Read's politics in relation to his art-writing, see Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); David Goodway, ed., *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998); Catherine M. Nutting, "Art and Organicism: Sensuous Awareness and Subjective Imagination in Herbert Read's Anarchist Aesthetics," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 45:2 (2012): 81–94; and Ben Cranfield, "A stimulation to greater effort of living': The Importance of Henry Moore's 'credible compromise' to Herbert Read's Aesthetics and Politics," in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity* (London: Tate Research Publication, 2015), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/ben-cranfield-a-stimulation-to-greater-effort-of-living-the-importance-of-henry-moores-r1151301> (accessed September 10, 2016).

³⁰⁹ Sir Herbert Read, "Recent Tendencies in Abstract Painting," *Canadian Art* 15:3 (Summer 1958): 192–203.

Summer and Autumn 1959 issues of *Canadian Art*.³¹⁰ Plaskett, who was himself a modern artist and close friends with Jock Macdonald and his wife Barbara, later recalled that his reaction to Read made him an veritable outcast in the Toronto scene, costing him not only his ability to sell his paintings but also his relationship with the Macdonalds, who he never saw again.³¹¹ For the Macdonalds, it seems, Read's ideas were important enough to sever a friendship over.

Alexandra Luke was particularly taken with Read's 1939 *Art and Society*, and lifted passages from Read's book to include in the lectures she frequently gave in Toronto. Compare, for example, the following passage from Read's publication and a draft of essay written by Luke, respectively. Read's *Art and Society* states:

Many of the critics of abstract art...dismiss it...as completely devoid of social actuality...[But] the same criticism may be made of higher mathematics, but no one is so superficial as to assert that higher mathematics is a useless and anti-social activity; instead it is freely admitted that many of the greatest advances in civilization (for example, wireless telegraphy and aeronautics) are dependent on the

³¹⁰ Joseph Plaskett, "The Reactionaries: A Reply to Sir Herbert Read, Part I," *Canadian Art* 65 (Summer 1959): 192–197; and Plaskett, "The Reactionaries: A Reply to Sir Herbert Read, Part II," *Canadian Art*, 66 (Autumn 1959): 232–239.

³¹¹ Roger H. Boulet, *Joseph Plaskett: Reflections and Shadows* (Penticton: Penticton Art Gallery, 1994).

services of pure mathematicians. The function of abstract art must be envisaged in a similar way.³¹²

In her essay, Luke writes:

...abstract art is like high mathematics and cannot be explained away in a few breezy paragraphs. Similarly, even as high mathematics is fascinating to the mathematician in comparison to school arithmetic, so we find abstract art satisfies the alert 20th century artist rather than realism. But unlike higher mathematics, abstract painting may be a stimulating experience to the spectator as well as the artist.³¹³

Although the text used by Luke in this particular case does not represent Read's philosophical theories on modern art and abstraction, it suggests that Luke, and perhaps other Painters Eleven members, were closely following Read's writings. In another distillation of politicized art criticism, however, Read's associations with anarchism did filter through into Painters Eleven's interests.

Read was interested in the origins of art and its function in evolutionary development of human civilization. His theorizations of art and modern art revolved around the specific creative relationships between nature and artist, and investigated a

³¹² Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), 125–126.

³¹³ Handwritten draft of an essay written by Alexandra Luke, Box 3, Envelope B, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

“vital organicist” approach to art-making, a concept with no strict definition but that encompasses a collection of Read’s ideas about art’s harnessing of the biological structures and material properties of the natural world to “create microcosms which reflect the macrocosm” of the universe.³¹⁴ Together with the palette of botanic moss greens and marine-like blues, Hodgson’s painting, with its predominant ovoid theme, produces a visual effect that is markedly connected to this vital organicism. In *It Became Green*, the configuration of forms appears as a cluster of biologic matter, a mass of homologous cellular mutations which, as their contoured membranes press or meld together, are animated in a living process of transfiguration or growth. *It Became Green* operates in visual dialogue with the organicism of Sutherland’s *Thorn Trees* (1946) [Fig. 30] as well as Cahén’s *Candy Tree* (1952) [Fig. 2], both of which favor natural models of vegetative “germinal forces” and “dim analogues of roots, of larvae, of knots” in affirmation of their creative power.³¹⁵ This English discourse, represented heavily in Canada through Read’s writings and Sutherland’s paintings, was circulated among Painters Eleven and were especially impactful on Cahén and Luke.³¹⁶ It offered a different perspective on abstraction by prioritizing nature as the root of artistic creativity, the power of the natural organism to stimulate aesthetic imagination and materialization of visual form. As such, an image such as *It Became Green* articulates a layered,

³¹⁴ Article from the *London Bulletin*, quoted in David Thistlewood, “Herbert Read’s Organic Aesthetic [I]: 1918–1950,” in *Herbert Read Reassessed*, ed. David Goodway (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 222. See also Read, *Art and Society*, 259–60.

³¹⁵ Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse: Essays in Criticism* (Routledge, New York: 1957).

³¹⁶ Finlay, “Identifying with Nature.”

intertextual network of ideas, and evokes different understandings of “expression” that come together as competing dialogues in tension in the image. In its “all-over” flatness, Hodgson’s *It Became Green* still offers a compositional quality that transmits the idea of “expression” as a creative relationship inspired by nature and reproduced by the artist. Perhaps for this same reason Ronald would resist association with any established classification or “school,” rejecting the term “abstract expressionism” and preferring the more generalized “creative painting.”³¹⁷

The genealogical and aesthetic distinctions between these two modalities of “expression”—one that, rooted in European theorizations of abstraction, refers to the formal articulation of nature’s creative vitality and the other which, powered by American dialogues on modern art, defines expression through the painted mark of action and gesture as the indexical trace of the artist’s identity—are suspended in images like Hodgson’s *It Became Green* or Cahén’s *Candy Tree*. According to Karen Finlay, the vestiges of organic matter present in paintings such as these emerge out of a strong resonance with English art and sensibilities. In her 1994 article “Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955,” Finlay offers an analysis of the cultural and political circumstances under which Canadians were exposed to such British Art. Finlay argues that exhibition trends in national institutions like the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) and the AGT in the 1940s and early 1950s demonstrated a preference for British over American models of art.³¹⁸ In the 1930s, the NGC and AGT hosted the

³¹⁷ Correspondence from William Ronald to unknown recipient, 20 March 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³¹⁸ Finlay, “Identifying with Nature,” 47.

British Council's first major international exhibitions, from 1939–40 a survey of twentieth-century British art which was put together for the New York World's Fair toured Canada, and in 1947 the *British Contemporary Painters* exhibition was featured at the AGT. Following the return of Vincent Massey, who was Canada's High Commissioner to Great Britain from 1935 to 1946, from England with a sizeable collection of British art, the NGC would go on to purchase a number of artworks by Sutherland.³¹⁹ In contrast, the *Contemporary Painting from Great Britain, the United States, and France* exhibition at the AGT in 1949 was one of the "astonishingly" few shows of contemporary American painting shown in Canada.³²⁰ Additionally, *Canadian Art* magazine often published articles on modern British art, frequently reproduced paintings by Sutherland, including *Horned Forms* and *Two Standing Forms Against a Palisade*.³²¹ The political and cultural contexts that predisposed Canada to pay attention to modern British art, and Sutherland in particular, were tied to the strength of modern English art's international and critical reputation after the Second World War, thanks to the art-writings of Herbert Read.³²² In conjunction with anti-Americanism, the Massey Report and other cultural commentators like Harold A. Innis proposed to create more robust English connections to contribute to Canadian cultural elevation and education. A number of articles in *Canadian Art* were published on the topic, including Kathleen Fenwick's "Revival of British Painting" in the May 1947 issue.³²³

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid., 43.

³²³ Kathleen Fenwick, "Revival of British Painting" *Canadian Art* 4:3 (May 1947).

As a point of difference, where the abstractions emerging from English artists were being promoted by the Massey Report and entering into the artistic milieu of Toronto, and where they fit into English-Canada's reserved environment, the American Abstract Expressionist paintings were not as well-received. From Canada's midcentury point of view, the large-scale abstract paintings of the United States were linked to an American ideology characterized by an aggressive spirit of expression that was not in keeping with a European, English-oriented sensibility of Canadian art. Reception of American Abstract Expressionism in the late 1940s were informed by the tense Cold War cultural politics of the period, as critics in Canada described such American paintings in terms of a national spirit of *excess*. *Cathedral* (1947) [Fig. 31] was the only work by Jackson Pollock to be exhibited in Toronto before the formation of Painters Eleven, and was shown alongside works such as William Baziot's *Night Landscape* (1947), Willem de Kooning's *Painting* (1947), Stuart Davis' *Ursine Park* (1942), Robert Motherwell's *Emperor of China* (1948), and Max Weber's *Three Literary Gentleman* (1945) in the AGT's 1949–50 exhibition *Contemporary Paintings from Great Britain, the United States and France*.³²⁴ Art critic Beatrice Koerner uses choice adjectives to describe the spirit and consciousness behind American art, describing the "elements of the American consciousness" as "aggressiveness, cockiness and taste for experiment," and the "only tradition Americans share" as "the belief in unlimited self-expression."³²⁵ *Globe and Mail*

³²⁴ *Contemporary Paintings from Great Britain, the United States and France* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1949).

³²⁵ Beatrice Koerner, "Unlimited Self-Expression: A Comment on Some Recent Paintings from the United States," *Canadian Art* 7:3 (Spring 1950): 110–113.

critic Pearl McCarthy shared this perspective, writing: “sheer horror given reign, as if the country could afford plenty of everything, including both talent and neuroses...In all the whole exhibition is rather terrifying.”³²⁶ This is where the differences in scale between Toronto and New York painting emerge as a critical point of distinction. Ronald noticed this size disparity when he observed that “actually none of us paint large by N.Y. standards as some of their stuff fills a whole wall”—the “unlimited self-expression” of American painting was manifested in its massive scale, a “terrifying” monumentalization of uninhibited individual expression.³²⁷ As a consequence of this difference, while the *visual effects* of each of their abstractions may be comparable, whether in brushwork technique, or commitment to the integrity of flatness, the genealogical and subjective content of Toronto and New York painting are distinct and cannot be conflated.

Such an explicit discomfort with American abstraction stems from a growing anti-American discourse in Canada in the 1950s. This anti-Americanism permeates Canada’s early reception of Abstract Expressionism, whose disapproving perspective on the aggressive character and content of large-scale gestural expression resonates with Guilbaut’s assertion that, in the context of the Cold War, the practice was mobilized as an “expression of freedom...symbolized by action painting, by the unbridled expressionism

³²⁶ Pearl McCarthy, “Great Modern Exhibition has Terrifying Aspects,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 12, 1949, p.9.

³²⁷ Correspondence from William Ronald to Jack Bush, quoted in Robert McKaskell, “Changing Academies: The Rise of Abstraction in Canadian Painting,” in *Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s*, eds. Robert McKaskell, Sandra Paikowsky, Virginia Wright, and Allan Collier (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993), 27.

of artists completely without fetters.”³²⁸ While this approach to American Abstract Expressionism has been criticized as a monolithic inscription of Cold War ideology onto artistic intent and meaning, it is significant here that, at the cultural intersection of Canada and the United States in the postwar era, these discourses overlap. In Canada, the idea that Abstract Expressionism was being wielded as an ideological “weapon” of American cultural imperialism was no exaggeration. For Canadian cultural intellectuals like Vincent Massey and Harold Innis, it was not just a cultural offensive against Soviet communism and social realism but also an insidious cultural infiltration into Canada.

Regardless of its stylistic designation, *It Became Green, Drumbeat*, and the rest of Painters Eleven’s pictures were able to engage in the critical discourses surrounding abstract painting in New York, placing the two cities in aesthetic dialogue at the Riverside Museum. What allowed Painters Eleven to succeed in this specific international context was the intersectional character of their assemblaged modernist artistic philosophies which, by offering a similar set of concerns regarding the visual cohesion of an abstract image through non-figuration, the treatment of paint and textured brushwork, and the construction of non-illusionistic pictorial space, was comprehensible within the framework of “quality” established by AAA’s president. The “compatible *effects*” produced by the artworks have resulted in the common designation “Canadian Abstract Expressionists,”³²⁹ when in reality no single artistic philosophy can wholly define our

³²⁸ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 201.

³²⁹ See Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970*. (Toronto: Clarke Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1972); R. H. Hubbard, *The Development of Canadian Art* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1966); Gerta

understanding of Painters Eleven's visual practices, which are entangled in an unresolved network of competing frameworks and evident in the distinct techniques—Hodgson's motif composition in contrast to Ronald's gestural quality—that are articulated in their images.

Now confident and validated in their quest for international recognition, Painters Eleven found that their strategy of "harmony" was a success. It was not only able to consolidate their individual and distinct techniques and abstract aesthetics as a structure commensurate with the American Abstract Artists' own model, but it was also able to facilitate an artistic and cultural negotiation of overlapping modernist formal concerns by drawing from, and demonstrating compatibility with, a range of American and European art-critical modernisms. All the while, the harmonious relationship mediated by this breakthrough moment maintains contradiction and conflict, as Painters Eleven mobilized the New York show to reproduce and reaffirm their marginalization in Toronto. "Harmony," which allows for the group's internal tensions and frictions between individual members to coexist in contradiction, provides Painters Eleven with a fictitious cohesion under the banner of avant-garde collectivity.

Moray, *Harold Town: Life and Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2014); and also Fenton, Terry, and Karen Wilkin. *Modern Painting in Canada: Major Movements in Twentieth Century Canadian Art* (Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers, 1978); Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards a People's Art*. (Toronto, New Canada Publications, 1977).

Chapter Four: The Failure of Cosmopolitanism in Paris

The year of their success in New York is a critical moment in the history of Painters Eleven, but not simply because of the Riverside Museum exhibition with the AAA. It was also the year of their biggest and perhaps most jarring failure. While many scholars have readily established 1956 as a “watershed” year in the group’s narrative and have marked the exhibition as an event of international breakthrough, the failure is consistently ignored, even though it offers a vital glimpse into Painters Eleven’s internal structure, ideological contradictions, and relationship to the midcentury Canadian cultural project of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

In April 1956, while Painters Eleven were celebrating and posing for photographs at the opening of the Riverside Museum show in New York, they were also on the cusp of a catastrophe—the cancellation and rejection of an exhibition in Paris. The group had, just nine months prior to the AAA show, received news that they were going, with “certainty,”³³⁰ to have an exhibition at the Petit Palais Musée des Beaux Arts, to be organized by Michel Tapié, the influential French art critic and curator, as well as the First Secretary for Cultural Affairs at the Canadian Embassy René Garneau. This was going to be the year of Painters Eleven’s overwhelming victory as a group—the triumph and achievement of their international modern art vision in the face of their persecution and repression in Toronto. By the end of 1956, however, something had gone horribly wrong. Letters from Tapié and Garneau had abruptly stopped arriving. Paris had

³³⁰ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Painters Eleven, 25 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

suddenly, and without notice or explanation, abandoned any and all intention of staging the exhibition. Bewildered and wounded by this turn of events, Painters Eleven feared that larger forces were at work to sabotage their success abroad. In fact, they suspected, bitterly, that the cultural authorities of their very own nation—Canada—and its cultural political institutions were the culprits.

It is this crucial juncture that reveals all too clearly the tensions between the political liberal cosmopolitan ideology being promoted by official English-Canadian cultural channels such as the National Gallery of Canada and the Massey Report, and the internationalist aspirations of individuals like Painters Eleven. As actors operating within the same worldview as the Massey Report's official cultural outlook, Painters Eleven found themselves in material and practical conflict with national institutions and state interests despite their common goal—the mobilization of modern art towards the cultural progress of Canada in the context of an international world order. While it might appear on the surface that Painters Eleven entered seamlessly (or perhaps “harmoniously”) into the fabric of official Canadian culture at this midcentury moment, primarily because their cosmopolitan approach towards abstraction dovetails all too smoothly with the Massey Report's insistence that “modern painting can no longer exploit the novelty of the Canadian landscape,”³³¹ there exists in actuality a tension between artistic and official discourse that complicates the cultural dynamic between individual and state. This moment of failure for Painters Eleven allows us to investigate the ambivalence of both positions occupied by Painters Eleven as social actors and by institutions like the NGC or

³³¹ Canada, *Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951), 18.

their representatives as state authorities, in order to examine the complex entanglement of competing social and political interests and desires in midcentury Canadian cultural politics.

“We Sink or Swim On Our Own Worth”

In late August of 1955, Painters Eleven received electrifying news: they had secured a group exhibition in Paris. Member Jock Macdonald, while traveling in France and England on a Canadian Government fellowship,³³² had been promoting Painters Eleven by proposing exhibitions to galleries such as Gimpel Fils in London and Rive Droite gallery in Paris. Macdonald’s reasoning for doing so was that abstraction was “the only idiom that will go over”³³³ in Europe. Gimpel Fils had expressed great interest in Painters Eleven, despite initially showing none at all in regards to Canadian art.

³³² In 1952, acting upon the Massey Report’s recommendation to establish overseas Canadian cultural programmes, Ottawa established the Canadian Government Overseas Awards, which funded year-long residences in France for an estimated thirty Canadian artists and students annually. In an effort towards Canada-France cultural diplomacy, the Canada Council awarded fellowships for French students and academics to study in Canada, establishing a programme for Canadian universities to host foreign professors. David Meren, *With Friends Like These: Entangled Nationalisms in the Canada-Quebec-France Triangle, 1945–1970* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2012), 73. See also David Meren, “‘Plus que jamais nécessaires’: Cultural Relations, Nationalism and the State in the Canada-Québec-France Triangle, 1945–1960,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 19:1 (2008): 287–288.

³³³ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 19 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Macdonald was incredibly frustrated by London's lack of knowledge about current developments in abstraction in Canada, which fed back into his disdain for the art establishment in Toronto. In a letter to Ronald, Macdonald wrote:

I asked George Gimpel who he knew about in Canadian Art. I was somewhat floored by his reply as the names went as follows—
Binning, Comfort, Ogilvie...and of course Riopelle, plus Buchanan of the National Gallery. He said that the *Canadian Art* magazine gave him a knowledge of what was happening in Canada. I told him that neither the magazine nor Buchanan could give him an idea of what was being done in Canada and if he cared I could show him coloured slides today of creative artists who wouldn't be discovered in the Can. Art. Mag. nor mentioned by Buchanan.³³⁴

When Macdonald presented the slides, Gimpel took down the names of all members of Painters Eleven, and was especially intrigued by the caliber of Hodgson's paintings. Apparently, Hodgson's abilities as a painter took Gimpel by surprise. Gimpel knew of Hodgson only as an athlete—he competed in two Summer Olympic games for Canada in sprint canoeing. Macdonald sensed that Gimpel was thinking about hosting a Painters

³³⁴ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 28 September 1954, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Eleven show, but there would be no follow up from the gallery, and no exhibition would come of it.

Gimpel's silence was not a huge blow to morale, because a bigger, better prospect had arrived on Painters Eleven's doorstep. The potential of Macdonald's exchange with London was compelling news, but thoughts of London were almost immediately displaced by the possibility of exhibiting in Paris. In August 1955, after seeing slides of their work, the unnamed "authorities" at Rive Droite—who met their artwork with "distinct and surprised pleasure"—were going to begin planning a Painters Eleven show, perhaps to be exhibited at the esteemed Petit Palais Musée des Beaux Arts, and hosted in coordination with Cultural Affairs at the Canadian Embassy.³³⁵ According to Macdonald, he was told by René Garneau, First Secretary of Cultural Affairs that "the French will certainly accept this," and, "there isn't an artist in the group who is unworthy of exhibiting in Paris."³³⁶ The news sent a wave of excitement through Painters Eleven, who were now on the cusp of not just one, but two international exhibitions in major artistic capitals, as the Riverside Museum show was set to open in April 1956 in New York. With Gimpel Fils also in the air, the possibility of a "3-way show" between New York,

³³⁵ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 19 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³³⁶ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Painters Eleven, 25 August 1955; and Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 19 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada. For more on Canada-France diplomatic relations in the immediate postwar period, see Meren, *With Friends Like These*.

London, and Paris seemed to be within their grasp.³³⁷ Letters fluttered back and forth between Macdonald, who was still in Paris, and Painters Eleven, who now needed to consider canvas selection to send to France for review. Macdonald explains: "We *must* be unselfish in the selection and send the six finest in the opinion of our members... [and additionally,] we must immediately make sure that several of *our best works* must be held back from the Ontario Show [original emphasis]."³³⁸ The message was clear—Painters Eleven's top works must be reserved for prominent, international exhibitions, and local exhibitions were not deserving of the same privilege.

By early 1956, Painters Eleven were confident that their international success was imminent. The upcoming exhibitions confirmed their self-envisioning as the avant-garde in Toronto, since they were now able to position themselves within an institutionalized context for modern art—within an ideology of “harmony.” Harold Town was so convinced that the group would be propelled into international spotlight that he wrote to the director of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Theodore Heindrich, to offer the Museum a chance to host Painters Eleven’s last local exhibition before their supposedly skyrocketing careers gave them the pick of any number of high-profile venues. “At a recent meeting of Painters 11,” Town writes to Heindrich, “it was decided to have only one more exhibition of paintings in Toronto before confining our activities to national and international shows. We plan as in the recent Riverside Museum exhibition in New York

³³⁷ Correspondence from Jack Bush to William Ronald, n.d., R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³³⁸ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Painters Eleven, 25 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

to show one canvas of major size by each member of the group.”³³⁹ The smugness is unmistakable in Town’s words, and consistent with Bush’s self-important “big league circles” remark which, as an added point, seems likely to have been drawn from the same Painters Eleven discussion mentioned by Town, since Bush goes on in his letter to say that he “agree[s]...that a Toronto show only is useless” for the group’s reputation.³⁴⁰

Once again, however, Painters Eleven’s grasp on the art scene in Paris was lacking. It is unclear who Macdonald spoke to at the Rive Droite, but it is telling that he cited comments from René Garneau, and that the show was to be held at the Petit Palais. Garneau was no art critic, and the Petit Palais was not exactly known for promoting the latest in avant-garde French art. Garneau was a Canadian diplomat from Quebec, a journalist and a literary figure who had worked for the Massey Commission in the late

³³⁹ Correspondence from Harold Town to Theodore Heindrich, n.d., MG30, D404, Volume 13, Files 12–13, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada. Thanks to Jaleen Grove for acquiring this archival data.

³⁴⁰ It should be noted here that members of Painters Eleven also continued to be committed and active members of various arts societies, including not only the OSA and RCA, but also the Canadian Group of Painters, Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, and the Society of Graphic Arts, during the period of Painters Eleven’s activities. Many were not only members of these societies but also served as elected executive committee officers for one or more society, while simultaneously taking part in Painters Eleven exhibitions and meetings. As such, Bush’s remark offers yet another contradiction between the rhetoric of Painters Eleven and their actions, as some of them continued to rely on art societies to gain visibility as solo artists. Bush’s haughty threat, however, was briefly realized in 1958, when all eleven Painters boycotted the OSA’s annual exhibition, refusing to submit artworks to the jury selection. See *The 86th Annual Exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists* (Toronto: Ontario Society of Artists, 1958).

1940s. Before the Second World War, Garneau had called for strengthened links between French Canada and France.³⁴¹ As the First Secretary of Cultural Affairs at the Canadian Embassy, Garneau was tasked with developing and fostering cultural relationships between France and Canada as a part of the Massey Report's mandate to "promote the knowledge of Canada abroad."³⁴² This resulted in what David Meren calls a "Canada-Quebec-France triangle" of cultural diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s, which reflected urgent concerns about "Americanization" and American cultural influence among nationalists in all three places.³⁴³ As Meren argues, this triangle led to both conflict and cooperation, as the relationships within the Canada-Quebec-France sphere were shaped by an intersection of domestic circumstances and postwar international realities, as well as the broader evolution of transnational exchanges and interdependence that emerged after the war.³⁴⁴ France was particularly keen to forge intercultural affairs. "Paris," Meren writes, "attached even greater importance to cultural diplomacy after 1945 as a means to compensate for its diminished geo-political stature and to raise a French voice in a world dominated by superpowers."³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Meren, "Plus que jamais nécessaires," 287–288.

³⁴² Canada, *The Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1951), 253–254.

³⁴³ Meren, "Plus que jamais nécessaires," 285.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Meren, "Plus que jamais nécessaires," 285.

In a rattled postwar France, the Parisian milieu was perhaps even more complex than in New York.³⁴⁶ Paris in the midst of what French critic Georges Duthuit called a “universal puzzlement,” where a number of abstract as well as figurative painting styles emerged along with their supporters—each vying to renew or reclaim the country’s artistic and cultural image.³⁴⁷ While Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning were being championed in the United States by Clement Greenberg as the new superior painting, praised for their raw technique and unfinished style, in France, there was little agreement about what direction Parisian art should take. Within the French palate of refinement and sophistication, the School of Paris was understood to refer to a lineage of a French modern tradition, the institutionalization of the achievements of Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso as a form of nationalistic identity.³⁴⁸ There were those in Paris who supported continuing the modern tradition of the School, but others renounced it. By 1950, a number of critics came forward with their own idea for French art. Degand promoted geometric abstraction, Charles Estienne called for an expressive *tachism* rooted in the French automatic surrealist tradition, and Michel Tapié moved towards a broader sense of abstraction—something he called *art informel* or *art autre*. Grappling with its own postwar artistic identity and struggling to re-establish its cultural preeminence,

³⁴⁶ See Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris*; Serge Guilbaut and Manuel J. Borja-Villel, eds., *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and All That Jazz, 1946–1956* (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007); and Guilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism*.

³⁴⁷ Georges Duthuit, "Painting in Paris Today," *Listener* (July 1953): 188. See also Adamson.

³⁴⁸ Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris*.

French art was “stuck between tradition and revolution,” and the renewed presence of foreign-born artists such as Karel Appel, Ellsworth Kelly, Sam Francis, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Joan Mitchell, Kumi Sugai and Zao Wou-Ki, were further complicating the scene.³⁴⁹

In the 1950s Michel Tapié was a leading art critic, supervising the Rive Droite and Galerie Stadler. Even though Macdonald showed his slides to “authorities” at the Rive Droite, it seems that at this stage Tapié was not involved in the communications. Both the Rive Droite and Galerie Stadler were leading private galleries of avant-garde and modern art in Paris. The Petit Palais, however, did not have such a reputation. It was an established conservative, academic institution, having featured exhibitions such as *Les maîtres de l’art indépendant 1895–1937* in 1937 and *Un Siècle d’art Français* in 1955. The proposed Painters Eleven exhibition at the Petit Palais by Garneau should have signaled to the Toronto group that something was amiss—that they were not dealing not with the Rive Droite itself, but with a cultural diplomat who was invested in promoting Canada-France artistic relations. In June and July 1956, nearly a year after initial contact with Garneau in August 1955, Macdonald was still in early negotiations with the Secretary of Cultural Affairs. On July 16, Macdonald reported that Garneau had

³⁴⁹ Serge Guilbaut, “Disdain for the Stain: Abstract Expressionism and Tachism,” in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 29–50. See also Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris*, 73–114; and Michael Plante, “Fashioning Nationality: Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, and American Expatriate Artists in Paris in the 1950s,” in *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad*, eds. Laura Felleman Fattal and Carol Salus, 135–147 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

confirmed the Paris show for the Fall but suggested a change in location, from the Petit Palais to Jacquemart André Museum on the Boulevard Haussmann—another elite and academically-g geared institution.³⁵⁰ Either in their ignorance of Paris’ institutions and internal artistic politics, or in their excitement, Painters Eleven failed to notice that they were being positioned in a conservative venue.

Meanwhile, Painters Eleven believed that they had finally achieved international success. They felt that by exhibiting in New York, and now to be shown in Paris, they had also dislodged the eminence of Montreal’s presence in the artistic centers of the world. This much is made clear in the May 1956 *Art News* article about the group’s showing at Riverside, where Lawrence Campbell divulges that the “tensions” between Montreal and Toronto “prevents any solidarity or contact between their respective artists.”³⁵¹ Campbell’s review also accounts for their differences in influence, contending that “the French group in Montreal thinks of itself as an offshoot of Paris; the Torontonians are closer to New York emotionally as well as in geography.”³⁵² As mentioned in Chapter Three, Campbell’s short article may appear to be an unbiased third-party observation of the cultural stakes of Painters Eleven’s situation—he writes: “there has never been a Canadian style...although landscapists may have gone in...for snow, pinetrees, northern skies”³⁵³—but the *Art News* critic was relying heavily on the information and perspective provided him by Macdonald, who had met Campbell for an interview about the group in

³⁵⁰ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 16 July 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁵¹ Campbell, “Canadian Painters Eleven,” 50.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

February earlier that year.³⁵⁴ The rhetoric of alienation and marginalization in Campbell's article is without a doubt reiteration of Painters Eleven's—and here perhaps more specifically Macdonald's—own anxieties over the what they considered to be the purposeful suppression of abstraction in favor of conservative landscape paintings within Toronto arts academies. Similarly, the review published in *Time Canada* entitled “Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan,” approaches the subject from the point of view of quoted interviewee Jack Bush, evident in statements such as “they [Painters Eleven] have had to contend with the public's massive indifference, and with critics whose attitudes ranged from boredom to outrage,”³⁵⁵ which carries the same tone of resentment as Painters Eleven's self-authored exhibition materials.

After his interview with *Time Canada* for the article, Bush recounts to Ronald how he “shrugged” when asked, “you guys know you're good painters—why the silence [from Canada]?” and that “*Time* was very interested in my account of the speeches at the opening, the quotes I had and general reaction of Americans.”³⁵⁶ What Bush perceived to be a corroboration and substantiation of their perspective, a confirmation of Painters Eleven's modern “up-to-dateness” with the international art world as evident in the interest expressed by significant press outlets—*Time Canada*, a publication that targeted broad audiences beyond the limited art sphere, and the internationally distributed *Art News*—was in reality an uncritical retelling of Bush's own narrative. Important to note

³⁵⁴ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 17 February 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁵⁵ “Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan,” *Time Canada*, May 7, 1956, p. 58.

³⁵⁶ Correspondence from Jack Bush to William Ronald, n.d., R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

here is that, as told by Bush, *Time*'s question is not framed as an *external* attesting of Painters Eleven's superiority from international sources, not that the world "knows" they are "good painters," but rather a parroted affirmation of their already internalized self-appraisal—"you guys know you're good painters [emphasis added]."³⁵⁷ For Bush, however, it is authentication by a witness. "It's funny," he continues, "how the whole bitter truth of the cold shoulder accorded us on all sides in Canada becomes so obvious." Bush was convinced that the *Time Canada* article would "blow the top off something" in Toronto, finally shaking the city out of its stupor of traditionalism and into realizing the truth of Painters Eleven's modernist convictions, which they "have been waiting for so long."³⁵⁸

It is imperative not to conflate Painters Eleven's state of *being-in-common*,³⁵⁹ or indeed any part of "Canadian modernism," with internal ideological cohesion, or externally validated construction. It must be made clear that the term "ideology" here does not denote a systematic aesthetic program rigidly grounded in a narrow political project. Rather, I use the term here to designate a body of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions about the world which are bound up in the production of meaning and values in social life, and which structure representation and discourse.³⁶⁰ This body of perspectives,

³⁵⁷ "Canadians Abroad: Rebels in Manhattan," 58.

³⁵⁸ Correspondence from Jack Bush to William Ronald, n.d., R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁵⁹ Nancy, *The Inoperable Community*. See also Chapter Two.

³⁶⁰ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *On Ideology: Radical Thinkers* (London: Verso, 1984), 1–60. See also James Kavanaugh, "Ideology,"

which are historically and socially contingent, becomes ideological when it is naturalized and elevated to an eternal truth. Ideology provides a relatively cohesive framework of beliefs which are reaffirmed, through modes of discourse and cultural production, to be essential and true.³⁶¹ In the absence of traditional criteria for evaluating modernist works of art, individual artists, and Painters Eleven's innovative uses of language and form, become self-validating standards of aesthetic value.³⁶² Painters Eleven's success in New York served to naturalize and reaffirm their own cultural and aesthetic position, which was that of the internationalizing and universalizing power of abstract painting.

“International” and “universal” in this sense referring to Painters Eleven's belief in their ability to connect Canada with the rest of the world through abstraction's non-representational form, and through a shared experimentation of the visual language among artists around the globe. As Mark Cheetham notes, the ideology of abstraction relies on “the appeal *to* and the appeals *of* universality and ‘purity.’”³⁶³ The interesting

in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

³⁶¹ Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” See also Preben Mortensen, *Art in the Social Order: The Making of the Modern Conception of Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 180; and Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

³⁶² See Tyrus Miller, “Politics,” in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, eds. David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Maiden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 32–33.

³⁶³ Mark A. Cheetham, “The Nationalities of Abstraction: From Universal Language to Placed Expression,” in Josée Bélisle and Mark A. Cheetham, *La question de l'abstraction* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013), 82. See also Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity*.

trajectory of Painters Eleven's exhibitionary history, from the local to international, then seemingly backwards to the national but cosmopolitan, appears to naturalize or "recapitulate" the ideals of abstract art as a universalizing form.³⁶⁴

Leveraging their New York success to push for bigger reputations and major venues in Canada, however, appears to have only been a tactic of mixed and limited effectiveness, which then lasted only for a short few years before another failure—the disbanding of Painters Eleven in 1959. Painters Eleven's strategy to accept only national or international shows yielded results that were less than ideal, as they would not secure another international exhibition as an exclusive group during the existence of their organization.³⁶⁵ They were included in part in the Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts' large-scale survey exhibition *A Canadian Portfolio* in 1958, where Painters Eleven were already being inserted into a narrative of "national" Canadian art.³⁶⁶ Feature exhibitions

³⁶⁴ I borrow here from Cheetham, who makes a similar argument about Borduas in "The Nationalities of Abstraction," 84.

³⁶⁵ As mentioned in the previous note, Painters Eleven continued to exhibit as individuals, featuring in solo, two-man, or four-man shows in Ontario. Kazuo Nakamura signed with the new commercial Greenwich Gallery of Contemporary in Toronto run by Av Isaacs. During this time, William Ronald became the most successful in establishing an international reputation. In 1957 Ronald signed with the Sam Kootz Gallery in New York, and also won that year's International Guggenheim Award for his painting *In Dawn the Heart* (1954), which would also be the first painting of Painters Eleven bought by the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1956. Ronald, still living in New York during this period, resigned from Painters Eleven shortly thereafter following a major disagreement with those in Toronto over the handling of 1957 Park Gallery exhibition catalogue.

³⁶⁶ *A Canadian Portfolio: The Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts Looks at Art in Canada, September 3–November 3, 1958*, ed. Myra C. Livingston (Dallas, Texas: Dallas

also took place at the Park Gallery in Toronto in 1957 and 1958, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montreal in 1958, and at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' Stable Gallery in 1960.³⁶⁷ While the ROM did not pick up the exhibition proposed by Town, the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) did, organizing a circulating *Painters Eleven* exhibition which travelled across Canada to cities such as Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver in 1958–1959.³⁶⁸ The NGC's exhibition seemed to have been the national institutional acceptance that they were seeking, as it represented a validation of abstract and non-figurative painting by official channels of cultural regulation. From the perspective written by Jock Macdonald in the "Statement of the Painters Eleven Group of Toronto, Canada," a catalogue essay for the Dallas Museum's *A Canadian Portfolio*, the NGC's support has "established the fact that the Painters XI may now be considered a group of artists who are contributing to the historical development of art in Canada...something of worth to

Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1958). Included in this catalogue were the essays "The Story of the Group of Seven," by Lawren Harris, "A Statement on the Painters Eleven Group of Toronto, Canada," by Jock Macdonald, "Contemporary Art in the Maritimes," provided by the NGC, "Painters of Montreal," by Jean-René Ostiguy, "Painting in Ontario" by William S. A. Dale, "Painting in Canada's Prairie Provinces Today" by George Swinton, and "Painting in British Columbia," by Doris Shadbolt. Curator Myra C. Livingston's essay, "Art in Canada," tackles the question of "Canadian Art" and nationalism.

³⁶⁷ Painters Eleven also participated in the *Points of View with Ontario Institute of Painters & Painters Eleven* exhibition at the Public Library and Art Museum of London, organized by Clare Bice, curator, in 1958. William Heine, "Points of View Make a Lively Show," *Weekend Magazine* 8:45 (1958): 16–18.

³⁶⁸ Woods, *A History of Painters Eleven*.

the cultural assets of our country”³⁶⁹—a statement laden with the general anxieties surrounding the character and nature of “Canadian art” and nationhood during this period. It was their ambition, after all, to destabilize definitions of “Canadian art” that were firmly rooted, through their institutionalization as such in art societies and at the NGC in particular,³⁷⁰ in the geographic regionalisms of the Group of Seven.

The cooptation of Painters Eleven by the NGC and the lack of any serious international exhibition of Painters Eleven after 1956 was a fate foreshadowed by the failed Paris exhibition. During the initial stages of planning, while letters crossed back and forth between Jock Macdonald (who was still in Paris) and Painters Eleven in Toronto throughout the late months of 1955 and early months of 1956, concerns began to emerge over possible interference by authorities in Canada with political and cultural agendas that were incommensurate with their own. By February 1956, these fears seemed to be coming to realization. Paris had become quiet in their correspondence about the

³⁶⁹ Jock Macdonald, “A Statement on the Painters Eleven Group of Toronto, Canada,” in *A Canadian Portfolio: The Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts Looks at Art in Canada, September 3–November 3, 1958*, ed. Myra C. Livingston (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1958), n.p.

³⁷⁰ For an informative discussion of the role of the National Gallery of Canada in the cultural nationalization of the Group of Seven, see Anne Whitelaw, “‘Whiffs of Balsam, Pine, and Spruce’: Art Museums and the Production of a Canadian Aesthetic,” in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), 127–137; and Anne Whitelaw, “Writing National Art Histories in Canadian Museums,” in *Museum Practice: Critical Debates in the Contemporary Museum*, International Handbook of Museum Studies Vol. 4, ed. Conal McCarthy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015), 401–429.

show. Letters to Paris were not receiving timely responses. Macdonald believed “that politics, Canadian, [had] nosed into [their] showing in Paris,” that “either the National Gallery, or the Governor General [Vincent] Massey has either tried to spike the show or else said that others should be asked to exhibit with us.”³⁷¹ It is significant that, despite having similar goals for Canadian abstract painting abroad, Vincent Massey and Painters Eleven were not in communication, in alliance, or in agreement about how the task was to be carried out—in fact, Massey appears to be an antagonist in the situation.

Macdonald’s report of “skull-duggery entering to destroy our plans” was disastrous news. While Macdonald had discovered that the modernism of Painters Eleven was much more readily accepted in Paris and London than in their home city of Toronto, it seemed that even an overseas exhibition would be hindered by the nationalist interests of the Canadian milieu. It was precisely what Macdonald had made demands against, having categorically stated to Garneau that Painters Eleven would “sink or swim” without asking for the help of Donald Buchanan at the NGC, and certainly without the inclusion of any other artists from Canada.³⁷² By June 1956, as the Riverside exhibition in New York was stimulating the self-inflated, boastful remarks being made by Bush and Town, Painters Eleven were simultaneously beginning to lose hope for the Paris show, as correspondence from Garneau dwindled. Positive news perked very briefly in September, when they received a letter from Michel Jaoul, suggesting that Michel Tapié was working

³⁷¹ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 17 February 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁷² Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Jack Bush, 25 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

on possibilities for hosting them at Galerie Stadler.³⁷³ On a separate occasion, member Oscar Cahén seemed to be in negotiations with a gallery in Germany regarding an additional Painters Eleven show.³⁷⁴ Progress on both fronts, however, were not to regain momentum. Jaoul's letter was last substantial word that Painters Eleven would receive from Paris. As a final insult, Alan Jarvis, Director of the NGC, failed to appear at the Riverside exhibition to give a scheduled lecture. Although Jarvis had been caught up in a meeting with the Federal Cabinet Minister at the time and sent Jean Ostiguy in his place, Jock Macdonald considered it to be a purposeful, malicious rejection.³⁷⁵

In Ronald's last letter to Tapié, dated October 15, 1956, Ronald makes a last plea for any expression of interest in a Painters Eleven show. They had not heard from the "Canadian Government" about negotiations for following through with the exhibition with the Embassy's financial support. "Nevertheless," Ronald writes, "it is the earnest desire of Painters Eleven to organize a Paris exhibition if at all possible"—would Tapié be willing to arrange an exhibition, and what would be the cost, without the financial assistance of the government?³⁷⁶ The correspondence was met with silence. In all

³⁷³ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 12 September 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

³⁷⁴ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 16 July 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

³⁷⁵ In reality, Jarvis was caught up with the Federal Cabinet Minister as part of his NGC duties and had sent Ostiguy in his place. Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 29 April 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

³⁷⁶ Correspondence from William Ronald to Michel Tapié, 15 October 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

probability, Tapié was likely uninterested in Painters Eleven's work because of his interest in American Abstract Expressionism and Montreal art. Tapié already had a Canadian champion in Quebec artist Jean-Paul Riopelle. Riopelle embodied what Tapié called *art autre*, or *art informel*, an abstraction that, regardless of nationality, counteracted the rigid order of geometric abstraction emerging from the remains of the School of Paris.³⁷⁷ What mattered for Tapié was not a matter of national ideology but individual expressivity and freedom from classification—the meaning of *art autre*, “an other art,” signified the acceptance of any style “other” than the coldness of geometric abstraction. *Art autre* supported the works of Riopelle, Pollock, de Kooning, and American-expatriate Sam Francis. Working with the artist Georges Mathieu, Tapié would be the first to exhibit the works of Pollock in Paris in 1951 alongside these artists in the exhibition *Véhérences confrontées*.³⁷⁸ Tapié supported Pollock, and organized his first solo exhibition in Paris at Studio Paul Facchetti in 1952. Staging the context in which he brought American abstraction together with Parisian abstraction in *Véhérences confrontées* as a “confrontation,” Tapié fully acknowledged the tensions around these nations and their artistic styles, but also embraced the opportunity to show how individuals from America and France could embody the attitude of freedom and individuality.

³⁷⁷ Serge Guilbaut, “Brushes, Sticks and Stains: Addressing some Cultural Issues in New York and Paris after World War II,” in *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and All That Jazz, 1946–1956*, eds. Serge Guilbaut and Manuel J. Borja-Villel (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007), 15–63. See also Adamson, *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris*.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

But it was not a one-way decision to abandon the Paris show. Throughout the summer of 1956, on Toronto's end, Painters Eleven were beginning to come apart at the seams. There was a sudden swing in opinion about Paris. After hearing about the withdrawal of monetary support from the Embassy, Painters Eleven learned that they would have to finance the exhibition themselves. Faced with the possibility of paying out of pocket, every member but Macdonald, Luke, and Bush was now against the Paris show. Bush was "flabbergasted at a complete switch in thinking" that was expressed in the recent Painters Eleven meeting and, amidst the "disappointing reversal" of their interest, Bush was surprised when Town, Nakamura, Hodgson, Yarwood, and Mead all revealed that they had upcoming one-man shows in Toronto around the same time as a Painters Eleven exhibition.³⁷⁹ Once again, "harmony" for Painters Eleven only exists to the extent that it is advantageous for them to mobilize the ideology as a group, but internal conflict and belligerence remains a constant among them. Five of the eleven artists had secured solo exhibitions without the knowledge of the rest of the group—further evidence of their incohesion and lack of involvement in each other's affairs. Despite his disappointment in this news, Bush understood that Painters Eleven was not meant for such personal intervention. "However," he wrote, in an enactment of English-Canadian courtesy, "it's my job to keep out of it."³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Correspondence from Jack Bush to William Ronald, n.d., R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

Aesthetic Internationalism and the Transnational Cultural Outlook

What is to be made of this failed Paris exhibition? In just over a year, from August 1955 to October 1956, Painters Eleven's prospects for an overseas exhibition, which would boost their international reputation, were raised and dashed. While Macdonald speculates that the administrative or diplomatic conspiracies between Paris and Ottawa—whose cultural officials did not represent Painters Eleven's interests—were the sources of sabotage, it is unknown what exactly caused the Paris exhibition to fall through. There is no real evidence of “skull-duggery” being carried out by any Canadian institutional authority, whether by Buchanan, Massey, or Jarvis. Letters from Garneau and Tapié, however, convey a lack of enthusiasm or perhaps disinterest for the project, as a seeming disorganization led to frequent changes in date and venue. The slow tapering of this correspondence from June to October suggests that Paris had simply lost enthusiasm, since no formal word was sent that might have notified Painters Eleven of the venture's termination.

Regardless, this incident is useful to mention here because it reveals two significant facets of Painters Eleven. First, it sheds light on Jack Bush, Jock Macdonald, and Harold Town's dismissal of pursuing local Toronto shows during that year. With an exhibition in New York in progress and one in Paris forthcoming, they were prematurely confident that Painters Eleven were on the cusp of international breakthrough. Second, it exposes yet another contradiction embedded within the group's character. While Painters Eleven were happy to accept an exhibition at the NGC in 1958 as institutional acceptance by regulators of national culture because it served their own interests, they were simultaneously hostile to, and distrustful of, these very same channels of cultural

administration. Despite their common transnational cultural ideology, as Barbara Jenkins has called it,³⁸¹ and their shared goal—national art practices that resonated in a cosmopolitan context and provided Canadians with an image of themselves as part of an international world order—it appears that Painters Eleven remained suspicious of state motives and institutions that had previously shown little interest in supporting Canadian modernism. It is once again conflict under the guise of harmony that constituted this intersection of state discourse and individual actor.

The appearance of harmony here operates as a parallel set of cosmopolitan values articulated by both Painters Eleven and the Massey Report, a document which promotes the nationalization of culture in Canada on a federal level. Both parties appear to align their cultural aims under what Barbara Jenkins calls a “transnational cultural ideology,” or an “outlook centred on the unique and restorative role of art and culture in ‘improving’ individuals and society,” a prioritization of culture in the constitution of the nation of Canada as a member of an international liberal order.³⁸² Transnational cultural ideology in Canada relies on the principle of an international standard of cultural consciousness, created through the careful cultivation of a transnational bourgeoisie who share a similar high culture taste³⁸³ oriented around the aesthetic and cultural traditions of Western

³⁸¹ Barbara Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy and the International Liberal Order,” in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 114–129.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁸³ Here, both Jenkins and I refer to Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

civilization. As Jenkins argues, this particular ideology is indispensable to the Massey Report, which insists on the need for urgent government intervention in the arts and humanities in Canada in order to not only elevate the nation's intellectual environment up to Western European high cultural standards of refinement, but to also defend against the dangerous encroachment of American, and low cultural, forms of consumerism and vapidness.³⁸⁴ The Massey Report's transnational cultural outlook, articulated in its findings and recommendations, thus encompasses a two-part approach, where the institutionalization of culture in Canada would create two simultaneous effects—first on an internal level, it would build a nation of refined individuals with a common internationalist worldview by shifting the priorities of cultural institutions away from local or regionalistic expressions of national identity, and second, as an external effect, it would initiate the recognition of Canada as a member of a transnational order or, as the Massey Report calls it, “the partnership of modern nations.”³⁸⁵

Painters Eleven hinged their own success upon this same transnational cultural ideology, rooted in the same cultural politics and discourses of midcentury Canada, and articulated in their specific aesthetic internationalism, which they believed was the key to the breakthrough of their abstract paintings in New York, Paris, and potentially beyond. They envisioned themselves as part of a postwar international modernism in art, and also oriented their perspective around the significance of abstraction for the cultural progress

1987); see also Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in J. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood: 1986), 241–258.

³⁸⁴ See Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy,” 114–129.

³⁸⁵ Canada, *Royal Commission*, 18; and Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy,” 120.

of Canada as a nation. As such it is their cosmopolitan mode of thinking which is an essential element of Painters Eleven's aesthetic internationalism and self-perception. As Jenkins explains, transnational cultural ideology is very close to, and relies upon, the ideology of cosmopolitanism, which links the national to the transnational or international by providing a worldview, or a "conduit" through which national intellectuals can situate their own cultural affiliations precisely by taking a reflective distance from these same affiliations and evaluating them within the context of a universal humanity.³⁸⁶ According to Jenkins, understanding this aspect of cosmopolitanism, where the part cannot be understood without reference to the whole, is "the key that unlocks the paradox" in the relationship between nationalism and internationalism—that the two "do not contradict, but are predicated upon, each other."³⁸⁷ Ulrich Beck has similarly defined cosmopolitanism as "a non-linear, dialectical process in which the universal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating principles."³⁸⁸

Painters Eleven members would, time and again, express their frustration with old modes of nationalistic expression and "the saturation" of "adoration for the Group VII [sic]."³⁸⁹ While the Riverside exhibition was a great achievement for art in Canada, according to William Ronald, "something Canada should be proud of," it was also

³⁸⁶ Jenkins, "National Cultural Policy," 124.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), 247.

³⁸⁹ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 20 June 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

important that cosmopolitanism, which is to say, evaluating any national cultural affiliation from a distance, with one eye on its relationship to an international condition, be maintained as an essential part of Painters Eleven's identity. Ronald writes:

I believe nationalism in any form is narrow, provincial, and dangerous in any field or endeavor. Whether it be art, politics or religion... We in Painters 11, and all other painters like us, are not and cannot be nationalistic. To me, true art in any form is universal. This, and the fact that the world we now live in is not a nationalistic world but a universal one, and in two or three decades I believe will be in interplanetary world and eventually 'outerspace' contact will be made.³⁹⁰

Ronald's outlook here is incautiously optimistic, moving beyond the cosmopolitanism of the world and to the truly universal, encompassing the extraterrestrial into his vision of humanity's future cosmos. However, his words resonate with the transnational cultural ideology of the Massey Report. Just as Ronald emphasizes the importance of developing a common cultural, abstract visual language in giving Canada "a more mature and broader language in all fields,"³⁹¹ so too does the Massey Report assert that "modern

³⁹⁰ Correspondence William Ronald to Jock Macdonald, 18 September 1956, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁹¹ Correspondence William Ronald to the Canada Foundation for Canadian Amateur Hockey Association Scholarship, 28 October 1952, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

painting can no longer exploit the novelty of the Canadian landscape...Our young painters are being judged on exactly the same footing as the abstract painters of other countries.”³⁹² Just as the Massey Report relies on a dual process of internal cultural elevation and external international recognition, Painters Eleven also maintain a cosmopolitan desire to produce both an “improved” national cultural repertoire of refinement, to turn the layman into a transnational bourgeoisie of “taste” by disarticulating a cultural code where figurative and landscape painting style held dominance,³⁹³ and an outward projection of an aesthetic internationalism on par with universal standards. In their role as cultural intellectuals and artistic producers, Painters Eleven envisioned themselves as public educators as well as international actors.

Thus the transnational cultural outlook that permeates the discourse of Painters Eleven’s aesthetic internationalism is also the same ideology behind Canada’s midcentury project to mobilize culture as a key component of nation-building within the realm of international cultural politics. Indeed, I would argue that Painters Eleven’s exhibition in New York was an event that enacted this very project, as it performed the internationalizing work of a modernized Canadian art practice that had been outlined in the Massey Report. Through the lens of the Massey Report, Painters Eleven’s acceptance into the fabric of an international milieu of artistic modernism bolstered the idea that abstract painting in Canada would elevate and cultivate a national high culture to join

³⁹² “The Royal Commission—Excerpts from the Report,” *Canadian Art* 8:4 (Summer 1951): 177. Also quoted in Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007), 92.

³⁹³ See Bourdieu, *Distinction*; and Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 241–258.

“the partnership of modern nations.”³⁹⁴ As Jenkins argues, the Massey Report’s promotion of abstract painting against figurative landscape was a promotion of “national art practices that resonated in a cosmopolitan context”—that is, Massey considered art and culture to be part of the process of producing a common cultural ideology, through the creation of a refined, transnational bourgeoisie with similar tastes, throughout the globe.³⁹⁵ While Massey wanted to defend Canada as a sovereign nation, Jenkins continues, he did not do so by insisting upon a vision of culture that was uniquely, or regionally Canadian, but rather by urging a culture of aesthetic internationalism based on the art traditions of Western Europe and, ultimately, “civilization.” For Jenkins, the cultural ideology that supports the idea of civilization is linked to the production of an international liberal order based on the cosmopolitan ideal of universal humanity and harmony.³⁹⁶ The Riverside exhibition in 1956 proved that contemporary Canadian abstraction was able to circulate autonomously within the cultural capital of the high art world of modern art, and thus that it possessed the potential to participate, both in discourse and in practice, in the production of a transnational cultural order.

However, it is apparent that while the cosmopolitan ideologies of the Massey Report and Painters Eleven were aligned in parallel at this historical juncture, their paths had yet to meet. While both events and ideas coincide within the same historical sphere of cultural-political transformation in Canada and reflect changing perceptions of the role and identity of the nation on an international stage, the success of Painters Eleven in New

³⁹⁴ Canada, *Royal Commission*, 18; and Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy,” 120.

³⁹⁵ Jenkins, “National Cultural Policy,” 124.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

York should not be understood as an institutionally-facilitated, direct practical implementation of the Massey Report or its transcultural principles. The Riverside exhibition was self-funded and self-organized and, from the group's perspective, the nonappearance of NGC Director Alan Jarvis for his scheduled lecture at the show opening was indicative of the indifference that cultural authorities had towards them in 1956. And although Painters Eleven sought the recognition and support of the Canadian government for their actions, they were in defiance of the art institutions that had spurned them and abstract painting for so long. They outright refused to seek the assistance of the NGC for the Paris exhibition, insisting to "sink or swim on [their] own worth."³⁹⁷ Thus despite their shared transnational ideology, Painters Eleven and the Massey Report conflicted on the matter of its practical implementation. The Massey Report's recommendations to strengthen Canadian exports prioritized federal-level policies that often did not include the NGC or individual artists, such as the proposed mandate to spread knowledge of Canadian cultural achievements abroad through diplomatic missions, which would involve the purchasing of works of art "on a generous scale...by the Federal Government to be used as gifts to institutions abroad."³⁹⁸ While "facilitating personal exchanges" across nations was also an aim listed in the Report, this is primarily directed towards the financing of Canadian artists to study abroad and return with broader cultural knowledge. Regardless, Painters Eleven thought it a threat to their operational

³⁹⁷ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Jack Bush, 25 August 1955, R2113, Volume 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁹⁸ This would become the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957. Canada, *Royal Commission*, 266.

autonomy to rely on institutional authorities in order to reach their own cosmopolitan aspirations.

Although it was a watershed moment for Painters Eleven, the Riverside exhibition was not without conflict. The stakes were high—it was not only the first step in achieving their international vision, it was also a vindication of their avant-garde rhetoric, a compensation for their alienation and marginalization in Toronto, proof of the competitive quality of their work and, finally, the recognition of their work independent of institutionalized cultural authority within the narrative of national artistic production in Canada. Within the larger cultural politics of the period, this concern for the nationalization of abstraction is infused with even greater anxieties surrounding the issue of Canadian cultural sovereignty. By gathering select ideas from a range of textual and visual European and American threads of artistic modernism and reformulating these strands into their own specific arrangements of modernism, Painters Eleven formulated the complexities of their own Canadian modernism, which was directed towards the legitimization of abstraction as both national and international visual language in Canada in the 1940s and 1950s. Successfully forging this connection in New York finally provided Painters Eleven with a common frame of reference for “modernism” by inaugurating themselves as the radical pioneers of the movement of abstraction and non-representation as manifest in English Canada.

Chapter Five: Creating the Space of Modernism

“Push and pull” was a dictum that Hortense Gordon repeated so often to her art students at the Hamilton Technical Institute that it earned her the nickname “the push and pull lady.”³⁹⁹ “Push and pull” was a compositional principle borrowed from the German-born Abstract Expressionist painter Hans Hofmann, who used the phrase to describe the dynamic relationships between each of the formal elements and optical forces of a painting. As Hofmann explains, the intersection of these elements and forces activates the visual surface with a tension between the painting’s “three-dimensional effect” and the preservation of the “essential two-dimensionality of the picture plane.”⁴⁰⁰ Gordon was a regular attendee of the renowned Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts in Provincetown, and was registered as a student there in the summers of 1946, 1949, 1952 and 1954. Hofmann’s teachings made a significant impact on Gordon, who began incorporating their methods, techniques, and terminology in her own painting practice and teaching. “Hortense,” recalls a former student, “couldn’t say three sentences without saying ‘push and pull.’ She’d tap her finger on the table 30 or 40 times and say ‘You must remember to push and pull.’”⁴⁰¹ Gordon was the eldest member of Painters Eleven and had been an

³⁹⁹ Jeff Mahoney, “The Push and Pull of Hortense Gordon,” *The Spectator*, June 21, 1994, n.p., Hortense Gordon Folder, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

⁴⁰⁰ Hans Hofmann, “Search for the Real in the Visual Arts,” in *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, ed. Sarah T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (Andover, Mass: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1948), 44.

⁴⁰¹ Mahoney, “The Push and Pull of Hortense Gordon,” n.p.

instructor of art and design at the Hamilton Technical Institute, Ontario, formally the Hamilton Art School, since 1918. For many of her students, “push and pull” was a ubiquitous saying in class but also “a blanket term which no one could really explain,” a “confusing” yet fundamental guiding doctrine at the heart of Gordon’s artistic philosophy.⁴⁰²

While “push and pull” was a cryptic idea to some of her students, Gordon understood that Hofmann’s principle attempted to answer some of the fundamental questions of abstract painting—how does non-figurative representation bear visual meaning or expression? What is the nature of aesthetic expression and the visual encounter with art, and what is the relationship between image-making and the world? For Hofmann, “push and pull” forged a visual relationship between the three-dimensional space of the world and the two-dimensional plane of the canvas. In his 1932 essay “Search for the Real in the Visual Arts,” Hofmann defines “push and pull” as the “expanding and contracting forces which are activated by carriers in visual motion. Planes are the most important carriers... The forces of push and pull function three dimensionally without destroying other forces functioning two dimensionally.”⁴⁰³ Hofmann insisted that every formal element of a painting—whether color, shape, line, or, plane—carries a different visual weight, effect, or even emotional potency. On a two-dimensional surface, the “expanding and contracting forces” of each of these elements

⁴⁰² Gordon Perrier, quoted in Mahoney, n.p.; and Shirley McBride, quoted in Grace Inglis, “Hortense Gordon, ARCA,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29:3 (Fall 1994), n.p.

⁴⁰³ Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 50. See also Cynthia Goodman, *Hans Hofmann* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1990).

interacts in a counteracting effect to every other element, and in doing so an optical effect of mass, depth, and volume is produced. A “spatial effect” results when pictorial planes are arranged oppositionally on the canvas and their movement is activated along a lateral or vertical axis. In other words, rather than defining three-dimensionality as an illusionistic reproduction of objects in a fictitious space, “pull and pull” attempted the “transference” of the three-dimensional “experience,” or the effect of mass and volume onto a two-dimensional surface, and through this transference, “nature is embodied in terms of the qualities of the expression medium.”⁴⁰⁴ According to Hofmann, in order to emulate the vigor of nature, the space of a painting “must be vital and active—a force impelled pictorial space” generated through the two-dimensional medium of paint. For Hortense Gordon, “push and pull” was a phrase that allowed her to understand how the pictorial space of the canvas might act autonomously from the figurative representation.

Most significantly, “push and pull” opened the connection between abstract painting and the lived world by offering a metaphysical understanding of nature, and by essentializing the cosmos into intangible states of being—such as energy, force, or vitality—rather than states of substance. Gordon, as well as many Painters Eleven members, could claim that abstraction produced a “different plane” of aesthetic experience which transcended physical knowledges and entered into the unknown realms of space and consciousness. In making such assertions, Painters Eleven were not simply musing on the poetics of the metaphysical or mystical, but rather were appealing to radical contemporary events that transformed scientific perspectives on the laws of the

⁴⁰⁴ Hofmann calls this transference of the three-dimensional experience into two dimensions “plasticity.” Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 78.

natural world. By the mid-1950s, major scientific and technological advancements had ushered in a brave new world of technological imagination. The dramatic unveiling of the atomic bomb in 1945, the invention of the field ion microscope in 1951, the inauguration of commercial television broadcasting in 1947, and the earliest accomplishments of aeronautical space exploration, together hailed the dawning of a new era in human history.⁴⁰⁵ The “Atomic Age” and the “Space Age,” with their shared motifs of orbs and ellipses coincided as interlinking themes of major popular culture and mass media imagery. Invisible particles zooming around did not just form the entire structure of Earth and the cosmic microwave background, they also transmitted images from a camera onto a television screen through wire and generated electricity to power homes. These milestones in human achievement were understood by Painters Eleven to have ruptured previously held assumptions about the physical boundaries and knowable limitations of the world, opening all of humanity to the possibility of transcendental and immaterial experiences of life through both the microscopic and the macrocosmic. As Alexandra Luke asserts in the artist statement for her painting *Space Computer*: “Thus the artist has

⁴⁰⁵ The atomic bomb also began a Cold War based on nuclear physics. The field ion microscope was invented by Edwin Muller. Commercial television broadcasting began in 1947 in the United States and in Canada. In 1944 the V-2 Rocket, produced by Nazi Germany, was the first man-made object to cross the boundary between Earth’s atmosphere and outer space; in 1946 the United States launched the first space research flight with its own V-2 rocket and took the first pictures of Earth from beyond Earth’s atmosphere. In 1951 the USSR put the first dogs in space. In 1950 work began on the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station rocket launch site in Florida to propel the first rocket into outerspace.

through creative painting suggested man's thrust into the unknown, beyond the planet earth, which is a mere beginning into the unprobed dimensions of the mind."⁴⁰⁶

For Painters Eleven, regionalist landscape painting or localized national specificity was irrelevant in their age of human achievement. As Jock Macdonald remarked in 1948 while expressing disbelief and astonishment that critics were unable—or unwilling—to connect twentieth-century aesthetic innovations with corresponding scientific and technological inventions: “Nobody seemed to relate the space dynamics of modern art to the new 20th century concept of space in science, architecture, or anything else. How they cannot see parallel concepts in all forms of creative works seems amazing.”⁴⁰⁷ For Macdonald, the revolutionary consequences of science on human knowledge of metaphysical and cosmic space are directly and indispensably correlated to aesthetic developments in pictorial space. Macdonald in particular believed that abstract painting's radical treatment of the picture plane was reflective of technology's impact on humanity's “new form of consciousness,”⁴⁰⁸ loosely defined as an awareness of the natural world's limitless boundaries. As such Painters Eleven's philosophies—like those of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman and other Abstract Expressionists in addition to

⁴⁰⁶ Typewritten notes by Alexandra Luke, n.d., Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa.

⁴⁰⁷ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to Marion Nicoll, cited in Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape, A Retrospective Exhibition* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981), 155.

⁴⁰⁸ In his artist statement for the *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* at the YWCA in Oshawa, Macdonald writes: “Our concepts about nature, space, and time have brought into being a new form of consciousness.” *Canadian Abstract Exhibition*, Oshawa YWCA, October 1952.

Hans Hofmann—were infused with the possibilities of the universal. “Universal” is a term that gains another layer of meaning for Painters Eleven in this context. In the postwar technological age, the universal may refer to the geopolitically global or international, to the aesthetic of abstraction which transcends representational particularity, or to the literal, infinite realms of outerspace—the invisible forces that govern the universe, from the atomic to the cosmic. Jock Macdonald's statement confirms that the overlapping of these significations is not coincidental or trivial. They are each interconnected through the concept of space, the meaning of which undergoes re-evaluation, negotiation, and redefinition in the discourse of art and culture in Canada.

This additional understanding of the universal once again puts Painters Eleven at odds with nationalistic outlooks. For Painters Eleven, the idea of abstraction is not restricted to its artistic definition as a non-figurative form of visual representation, but is also linked to a theoretical conceptualization of a new metaphysical spatial dimension which literally transcends physical matter and thus links the entirety of humanity, beyond nationalities or politics, to the insubstantial energies of nature and the universe. Yet, this particular spatio-temporal locale was characterized simultaneously—and paradoxically—by a postwar drive to solidify a national identity in Canada, a discourse of cultural politics and nationalism that Painters Eleven were also participants of.⁴⁰⁹ The tensions between the new scientific-technological outlook towards the universal and metaphysical against the drive to define the national offer another layer of insight into Painters Eleven's complex web of dialectics, woven out of their attempts to mediate and resolve conflicting ideas, identities, and desires. Thus, although Hans Hofmann's “push and pull”

⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter Four for a longer discussion.

was primarily an artistic doctrine to guide pictorial composition, the confrontational rhetoric and oppositional mechanism that is built into the phrase—presented as a contest between contradictory physical actions which require force—serves as an apt metaphor for Painters Eleven’s discursive state. Aimed at producing a perpetual, but ultimately balanced, pictorial oscillation amongst oppositional planes, shapes, and colors, the internal principle of “push and pull” parallels that of Painters Eleven and their ideological condition of “harmonious disagreement,”⁴¹⁰ as well as their interest in bridging national and international identities and spaces.

This chapter probes “harmony” as a framework for exploring the complexities that characterize Painters Eleven’s desire to reconcile the universalizing convictions of international abstraction with the increasingly urgent concern for national specificity in the wake of World War II. In Chapters Two and Three, this approach exposed the ideological work performed by the idea of “harmony”—and in their anti-manifesto of “harmonious disagreement”—which obscured Painters Eleven’s internal social tensions and disparate aesthetic practices under the guise of avant-garde collectivity and cohesion. Following from this, “harmony” also describes Painters Eleven’s assemblage of modernist artistic strategies and philosophies and how they used the idea of “space.” As these modernist ideas are appropriated, digested, and articulated within a larger cultural dialogue of postwar nationalism and internationalism, they form a seemingly smooth transition from the language of regional materiality to that of universal transcendentalism. The link between art and nature is constructed through a shared conceptualization of the transcendentalism of “space.” By binding together the concepts of pictorial space and the

⁴¹⁰ See Chapter Three for a longer discussion of “harmony” as ideology.

scientific-technologically defined realms of metaphysical space, Painters Eleven believed they were bridging the discourses of modernist artistic philosophy and cultural identity in Canada. Pivotal for Painters Eleven in this “harmonizing” project is that abstract painting be imbued with a communicative function—that is, for non-figurative visual forms to communicate the world’s new understanding of space and nature, and the calling for a heightened consciousness of a new spatial dimension that may even enter into the realm of the spiritual. In order to construct and establish this idea, Painters Eleven rely on existing twentieth-century modernist theorizations which define abstract painting as a vehicle of creative transmission engaged in a process of transferring the invisible forces and energies of nature to the viewer through the artist’s aesthetic impulse and formal creation.

This approach offers a crucial insight into the specific strategies—such as “push and pull” —appropriated by certain members of Painters Eleven, regardless of how incoherent and cherry-picked these strategies may be. From this perspective of “space,” Hofmann’s technique is mobilized by Hortense Gordon to connect non-figurative painting and metaphysical understandings of nature. Because “push and pull” attempts to create a “force impelled pictorial space” by transmitting energy and “vitality”⁴¹¹—the immaterial and intangible states of nature—Gordon used the dictum to contextualize her work within own spatio-temporal location, and to appeal to a more universal mode of aesthetic expression for art in Toronto and English Canada. What follows will highlight a handful Painters Eleven members as exemplars of how “space” was negotiated through European philosophies and into their own practice in 1950s Toronto. Since the group was

⁴¹¹ Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 49.

without a unified aesthetic program, their practices are highly individual, which makes a cohesive narrative of Painters Eleven impossible. As such while this chapter focuses on the work of Hortense Gordon, Alexandra Luke, Kazuo Nakamura, and Jock Macdonald, brief mention of other members will appear where their possible

Abstraction in Hamilton: Rising Above the Material

A brief look at one of Hortense Gordon's paintings, *Orange and Yellows Bound in Space* (1952) [Fig. 32], reveals Gordon's commitment to "push and pull" and its emphasis on the juxtapositional relationships between plane and color. *Orange and Yellows* in particular is structured around the dynamics of plane, evident in the painting's rigid configuration of rectangles, some of which act as fields of color and others of which behave as blocky lines or fragmented borders. The overall effect of this composition is a geometric uniformity,⁴¹² a homogeneity secured by Gordon's consistent handling and texturing of dry brushwork application throughout. It is typical of Gordon's canvases, where she attempts to deploy color, direction, and shape in counteractionary dynamics. For example, the strong presence of orange along the central axis of the picture is paired against its complementary opposite—purple—along the outer edges. Direction and shape are similarly structured in counterbalance, as the vertical, rectilinear orientation of the

⁴¹² Charles Harrison has noted that Hofmann's insistence on "the creation of the illusion of depth not through the modelling of forms in fictitious spaces, but through the mere location and juxtaposition of different planes of colour...imposed a kind of consistent and restricting geometry" in his paintings. Charles Harrison, *Modernism (Movements in Modern Art)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55.

composition is offset by two circular roundels and a purple diagonal line which cuts downward across the picture from the left, as two arrow formations curve around the outside of each circle, pointing in opposite directions. The result is a rather schematic, stiff image. In her pursuit of spatial activation, Gordon carries out the “push and pull” technique with such meticulous discipline that she generates formulaic rigidity. Despite this, Gordon achieves a degree of spatial depth or “three-dimensional effect” in areas where contrasts in light and dark values create a semblance of form and ground, or of modeled shapes against empty surroundings. Gordon’s paintings maintain this characteristic use of plane and color throughout the 1950s, as seen for example in *Figure in Solution* (1956) [Fig. 33]. Occasionally, Gordon incorporates some formal influences from other members of Painters Eleven, such as Harold Town’s compact, tightly bundled lines, apparent in *Time Bound In Space* (1957) [Fig. 34].

Gordon was using Hofmann’s terminology and concepts to inform both her teaching and her practice, grappling with his ideas and re-articulating them in her work and discourse. The success of this adoption is questionable: Gordon’s re-articulation may not have been very clear to her students, since many of her students at the Hamilton Technical Institute found the dictum “push and pull” impenetrable, and many of her paintings appear too rigidly dedicated to adopting Hofmann’s visual vocabulary. Despite these shortfalls, her attempts to instill the lessons of Hofmann’s spatial dynamics in her students, as well as her deliberate appropriation of his model of modernist thinking, is significant. Gordon’s is a clear example of how members of Painters Eleven integrated existing modernist concepts into their own understandings of modern art and their individual practices of abstraction, giving them the ability to place their work within the

discourses surrounding the larger world of abstract painting and the nature of aesthetic expression. In the continuous implementation of "push and pull" throughout her professional teaching career, Gordon set out to achieve a cultural awakening in Hamilton, where industry and manufacturing dominated her economic and social surroundings. Locked into Hamilton Technical Institute's push for advanced commercial and trade education and application, Gordon fused the autonomy of pictorial space in "push and pull" with the idea of the liberation of Hamilton's cultural space from its socio-economic dependence on the value of tangible resources, physical materials, and consumable products.

Hortense Gordon was a formidable figure in the greater Toronto area. At sixty-six years of age in 1952, she was already an established member of the Ontario art community, having built a nearly thirty-year long teaching career as an instructor of art and design at the Hamilton Technical Institute.⁴¹³ In 1924, she had been one of the first of the members of the Hamilton Technical Institute's art department to write an article, entitled "Design and Applied Art Essential to Industry," for the *Hamilton Spectator*.⁴¹⁴ Gordon's exhibition history is similar to other Painters Eleven members who were obliged to exhibit within the academically-regulated system of art societies, submitting their artworks for annual jury selection at the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA), the Royal Canadian Academy (RCA), or the Canadian Group of Painters (CGP). Her work was

⁴¹³ In the 1910s the Hamilton Art School transitioned into the field of "art and technical science" education and was renamed the Hamilton Technical and Art School. In 1923 it was renamed once more, as the Hamilton Technical Institute.

⁴¹⁴ See Inglis, "Hortense M. Gordon," n.p.

consistently accepted into the OSA shows from 1945 to 1952, her painting *Space, Form and Tension* (c.1947) was included in the RCA exhibition of 1948. In 1950, her work *Vertical Arrangement* was included in the Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Arts, which was a joint showcase of over 300 artworks from ten different art societies—including the OSA and RCA, as well as the Royal Architectural Institute and The Canadian Handicrafts Guild—hosted at the Art Gallery of Toronto (AGT). As it was for other members of Painters Eleven, the Oshawa YWCA *Canadian Abstract Exhibition* in 1952 organized by Alexandra Luke was simply another group show for Hortense Gordon.

Gordon was also one of the few Painters Eleven members who had been given international solo shows by the time of the group's 1953 formation.⁴¹⁵ As the eldest member, Gordon could boast a number of achievements as a painter of abstraction from Hamilton—in 1952 there were five solo shows of her work outside of Ontario, including one at the Creative Gallery in New York and another at the Phillips Gallery at Detroit Flint Institute of Arts. Her work was also included in the exhibition *Canadian Women Artists* at Riverside Museum, New York, in 1952. Because of these successes, Gordon was as frustrated as any other member of the group by the lack of critical recognition abstract painting received in Ontario, and expressed the same feeling of marginalization and alienation that is characteristic of Painters Eleven's writing. Anticipating the conservative Ontario community's response to her show at Agnes Lefort's gallery, Gordon writes to a friend: "I suppose what L. [Lawren] Harris calls my 'exciting color' etc. will greatly (?) 'shock' some of the RCAs [Royal Canadian Academy] who will be

⁴¹⁵ Of the eleven, only Oscar Cahén and Jock Macdonald had achieved the same status by 1953.

obliged to attend at 1028 Sherbrook E.[sic] — Lefort Gallery."⁴¹⁶ In this statement, the primary characteristics of Painters Eleven's avant-gardist rhetoric of oppression are all present—the notion of a radical or trailblazing usage of paint, the idea that such techniques produce a “shock” of the new in the face of academic conservatism, and a language that constructs controversy and antagonism. Indeed it is nearly identical in sentiment and rhetoric as, for example, Jock Macdonald's later boasts that “there will be lots of upsets amongst the artists in town,” that they “never saw anything more exciting in this city,” and that “there is plenty seething around,” made in 1955 and 1956.⁴¹⁷ Gordon's statements from 1952 attest to her own individual “interest in avant-garde status,” as Michael Leja has described it,⁴¹⁸ as well as her long-standing sensitivity to the issue of abstract and modern painting in Ontario long before her collaboration with Painters Eleven.

In October 1952, following her string of successful exhibitions in New York and Montreal, Gordon also wrote to Dr. Harry McCurry, director of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) to inquire about showing her work in Ottawa. In her letter, Gordon is exasperated with conservatism in Hamilton, where resistance to modern art stemmed not only from art societies and their academic traditionalism but also, according to Gordon, from pragmatic sensibilities which, forged out of an economic and social environment

⁴¹⁶ Gordon, quoted in Inglis, “Hortense M. Gordon,” n.p.

⁴¹⁷ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 29 January 1955; and Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 4 March 1956, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

⁴¹⁸ Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 23. See also Chapter Two.

built by steel and electric industries, found little import in metaphysical or introspective cultural production. She writes to McCurry: "It has been a long 'up - hill' effort on my part to try to put progressive art in its right place in Hamilton. There are those, especially in a manufacturing city, who cannot rise above the MATERIAL [emphasis original] and try to make any efforts toward a different plane, rather difficult, especially for a woman."⁴¹⁹ Here, Gordon's remarks reveal a keen perception of her own historical and gendered condition as an older woman artist in 1940s and 1950s Hamilton. As the capital of steel and electronic activity in Canada, Hamilton's life, economy and physical environment were dominated by industrial giants like The Steel Company of Canada (Stelco), Dominion Steel Casting Company (Dofasco), and The Dominion Power and Transmission Company, which brought hydroelectric power to the town. Hamilton was representative of Ontario's industrial economy. Gordon's "up-hill" battle for the validation of abstract art was thus fought in a city whose identity was circumscribed around an industrial economy and, with nicknames such as "Steeltown" and the "Home of the Manufacturer,"⁴²⁰ where the vigor of hard and durable material production held sway.

Gordon recognizes that her particular temporal-geographic location in a booming manufacturing capital, as well as her socio-historical position as a woman artist in her sixties, created a unique challenge for her ambitions. In her letter to McCurry, Gordon considers part of her role in Hamilton's society to be one of awakening—to mobilize

⁴¹⁹ Hortense M. Gordon to H.O. McCurry, 24 October 1952, quoted in Inglis, "Hortense M. Gordon," n.p.

⁴²⁰ See John Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1982).

abstract art's access into a "different plane" beyond sense experience, to enrich and elevate one's encounter with the natural world beyond a phenomenological knowledge of the world. Abstraction transcended the visual encounter with art into the realm of space and intangibility, and also allowed the viewer to access the metaphysical. What Gordon further suggests is that figurative painting and illusionistic representation, which fabricates the corporeality of objects and other observable phenomena by remaining faithful to their tactile qualities, serve an ideological purpose in the fabric of Hamilton's heavily industrialized society. For Gordon, what is embedded within the aesthetic conservatism of the city—and perhaps within even that of the greater Toronto or Southern Ontario region and its art societies—is not only an artistic ideology rooted in a belief in the value of skill and tradition, the eternal truths of nature and beauty, but also a socioeconomic framework of meaning based on the stability and plentitude of material resource generation and management. In other words, within this structure of signification, where cultural production is complicit in the discursive affirmation of economic security and social identity, visual representation of the world's physical permanence reinforce and re-asserts the fundamentality of matter, the socioeconomic value of material, and thus the durability of Canada's industrial and extractive geographies.⁴²¹ Abstraction's claim to autonomy and its abandonment of the domain of tangibility was a major threat to this ideology, a refusal to guarantee the economic and existential stability of a society dependent on material resources and manufacturing. It added a layer of disavowal that intensified the discomfort with abstraction's rejection of

⁴²¹ See Marilyn J. McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500–1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

the referential relationship between world and image. Hortense Gordon's remarks on Hamilton's inability to "rise above the MATERIAL" is thus an astute critique of the ideological underpinnings of "anti-modern" attitudes that are present in the greater Toronto area.

While Gordon's statement is aimed at the local, region-specific socioeconomic conditions of Hamilton, it is by no means an isolated dialogue. Her concern that Hamilton's ideological investment in a narrowly-defined industrial economy impedes and restricts access to broader, more open-minded, or even metaphysical cultural perspectives echoes a larger postwar dialectic between national cultural specificity and international or cosmopolitan outlooks. In particular, Gordon's rhetoric of awakening and elevation, as well as her desire to "put progressive art in its right place" resonates with the transnational cultural ideology that is underpinning, and threaded through, Painters Eleven's idea of "harmony" and the Massey Report's appeal to the nationalization of culture. As discussed in Chapter Four, a "transnational cultural ideology" is defined by Barbara Jenkins as an "outlook centred on the unique and restorative role of art and culture in 'improving' individuals and society," which in midcentury Canada manifests as a prioritization of 'high' cultural refinement in order to insert the nation into membership of an international standard of cultural consciousness.⁴²² As Jenkins argues, this particular ideology relies upon the ideology of cosmopolitanism, which "unlocks the paradox" between nationalism and internationalism by providing a lens through which

⁴²² Barbara Jenkins, "National Cultural Policy and the International Liberal Order," in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 120.

national intellectuals can situate their own cultural affiliations by evaluating them from an exterior position—that of a universal humanity. Following Jenkins, I argued that the transnational cultural outlook permeates Painters Eleven’s discourse of aesthetic internationalism, and that it is also crucial to their ideology of “harmony” because it promises to transcend paradox and resolve conflicting ideas.

Here, Gordon’s rhetoric continues to carry out the ideological work of the transnational cultural outlook, and does so specifically by inserting a dialectic between the realms of the physical and the metaphysical, between material and space, into the ideological structure. To “rise above the MATERIAL” and “make efforts towards a different plane” was to lift Hamilton’s cultural consciousness out of its industrial economy and into the cosmopolitan realm of universality by elevating the city’s aesthetic taste⁴²³ out of the figurative, geographic, and permanent understandings of nature and space and into the abstract, intangible, and immaterial. The overlap between “progressive” painting and an awakened cultural perception or perspective is clear, highlighting the ways in which the distinct discourses of artistic modernism and postwar cultural politics in Canada intersect and become entangled in this midcentury moment. Returning to “push and pull” as a metaphor for the tensions underlying Painters Eleven’s “harmonious” ideology, or a pushing and pulling of contradictory ideas, identities, and desires, Hortense Gordon’s situation can be understood as representative of Painters Eleven’s attempts to mediate the conflict between the national and the international, transnational, or universal.

⁴²³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, and Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 241–258.

Operating in tandem with the transnational cultural outlook, Gordon's perspective also reveals an appropriation, perhaps through Hans Hofmann's teachings and philosophies, of modernist answers to the question of how abstraction carries visual meaning, as well as how the process of image-making relates to the lived world—in other words, the process of creative artistic production. It serves as an example of how Painters Eleven's thinking was permeated with circulating modernist ideas, sources, and influences, all of which grappled with abstraction. Gordon's rhetoric articulates two particular principles of twentieth-century artistic modernist discourse—*empathy* and *expression*. While Gordon does not employ these terms herself, and nor does she attempt to contribute to its theorization, I argue that her understanding of abstraction is infused with these modes of thought. *Empathy* refers to the idea that abstraction attempts to communicate an artist's creative intuition and understanding of the natural world, and *expression* is the notion that the artist's understanding of the natural world is visually channeled or transmitted onto the ideal individual observer through the arrangement of the painting's formal qualities. Both aspects in turn rely on the principle of aesthetic autonomy, which asserts the formal self-sufficiency of the picture as independent from mimetic imagery or figurative references to real-world phenomena. This is to say that Gordon, like her fellow Painters Eleven members, subscribed to the idea that abstract painting facilitated a “transference”⁴²⁴ of the picture's creative content through the visual experience of shape, line, color, and composition. As such Gordon believed that her artwork, which captured the mid-twentieth-century understanding of nature's intangible and universal vitality through “push and pull,” could “transfer” and stimulate this new

⁴²⁴ Hofmann, *Search for the Real*.

level of comprehension onto the local observer, thus lifting the Hamiltonian out of its material and industrial consciousness.

One of the fundamental issues for abstract painting during this time was the problem of the relationship between form and meaning, between image-making and the world. Artists and theorists who addressed the issue in the early-to-mid twentieth century often articulated the idea that non-representational painting acts as a vehicle of creative transmission between the artist and viewer—that by eliminating the element of figuration, the image allows for a spiritual connection to be forged during the moment of visual encounter between the individual observer and the painting. One such figure was the well-known English critic Herbert Read, who was an influential figure in Canada.⁴²⁵ In his 1951 publication *The Meaning of Art*, Read explores *expression* as the final stage of a process of visual perception whereby “emotion or feeling” is channeled through the arrangement of a work of art’s material qualities—colours, shapes, patterns—into a “pleasurable” composition. *Expression*, according to Read, is thus “the variable element in art,” meaning that the art observer comes to any given emotional reaction based upon his or her individual understanding of these perceived impressions. It is that which is elicited by *form*, which is the instinctive image produced by another process—one in

⁴²⁵ Karen A. Finlay, "Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* (1994): 43–59. See also Chapter Three.

which the artist's own spiritual senses is "directed and defined" into a specific appearance.⁴²⁶

In other words, *form* and *expression* can be conceived as connected dual processes of artistic production and visual reception. At the same time that the art image takes a *form* which communicates—or to borrow from Read, "liberates"⁴²⁷—the artists' own inner emotional or personal character, it simultaneously offers to the viewer an aesthetic event whose *expressive* content may be restrained by the forms produced by the artist but in the end is also determined by the viewer's own stimulated experience of the painting. This notion is at the heart of an aesthetics of *empathy* which, drawn from the idea that sensory apprehension of an object is formed through the spectator's unconscious projection of emotional content onto that object—"emotional transference"—attempts to describe and explain the relationship between the work of art and the subjective spectator.⁴²⁸ It was summarized succinctly by German philosopher Johannes Volkelt in

⁴²⁶ Read also refers to this as the "will to form"—a purely instinctual activity driven by an artist's desire to produce either a balanced image or pattern, or "a "symbol for his inner feelings." Read, *The Meaning of Art*, 24–25.

⁴²⁷ Read, *The Meaning of Art*, 39.

⁴²⁸ Significant writings on the aesthetics of empathy include Robert Vischer, Harry Francis Mallgrave, and Eleftherios Ikonomou, eds. *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994); David Morgan, "The Enchantment of Art: Abstraction and Empathy from German Romanticism to Expressionism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57:2 (April 1996), 317–42; and Heinrich Wofflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. MD Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950).

1895, who made a connection between “the inner life of the artist, as objectified in the work of art, and with it the inner life of the viewer, objectified anew with every fresh contemplation of the work.”⁴²⁹ Such a theorization of the relationship between form and expression is the groundwork upon which modernism’s claims to autonomy are founded. As Charles Harrison has noted, it is the assumption that an ideal sensitive observer decides “what the picture expresses” based on an emotional response to the manner (or *form*) in which the image was made.⁴³⁰ This modernist position, which elevates the self-sufficiency of the picture and the value of non-figurative, expressive, or emotional coherence, is one that Painters Eleven enthusiastically explored in their writings as an intellectual engagement with contemporary dialogues regarding the problems of autonomy, expression, and form.

Like Gordon, William Ronald also found many of these ideas captivating, and especially those which were published by Allen Leepa in *The Challenge of Modern Art* (1949), from which Ronald took copious notes.⁴³¹ In 1952 Ronald produced a three-page type-written document dated December 20th which consists of phrases and sentences gathered from Leepa’s book and stitched together into a continuous text, revealing Ronald’s priorities when it comes to abstraction and its signifying processes:

⁴²⁹ Johannes Volkelt, quoted in Joseph Imorde & Richard George Elliott, “Empathy” in *Art History, Art in Translation*, 6:4 (Taylor and Francis, Routledge, 2014): 377–397.

⁴³⁰ Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison and Mel Ramsden, “Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation,” *Art History* 4:4 (December 1981): 432–456 and reprinted in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 197.

⁴³¹ Allan Leepa, *The Challenge of Modern Art* (Beechhurst Press, 1949).

During the process of painting from nature every creative artist reorganizes nature according to his feelings and ideas...art is mainly the repository of sensory and emotional stimuli...Abstract art appears abstruse when realism is looked for; but its meaning becomes clear when some of the felt forces comprising the work of art are experienced. Abstract work might then be considered very "concrete," for it deals with deep and mature creative experiencing in and through a medium.⁴³²

What this passage makes clear is that both Leepa and Ronald are interested in how the autonomy of a painting is maintained via emotional coherence, as well as how inherent meaning is located in the process of production. The notion that there is not only an expressive essence that is being transferred from artist in creative process to the surface of the canvas, but also that this essence can be observed, transmitted, and revealed to the perceptive viewer, is consistent with the idea of "transmission" articulated by Hans Hofmann and Hortense Gordon, and also with Herbert Read's concept of *expression* in *The Meaning of Art*. In Ronald's passage one also finds the insistence that abstract art is not an outright rejection of the natural world, but rather drawn from it as the very source of the creative process, addressing the problem of non-figurative art's relationship to the

⁴³² Ronald, unpublished notes, 20 December 1952, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa. Ronald quotes extensively from Leepa, *The Challenge of Modern Art*, 34.

real world with another modernist concept, *empathy*—the dynamic between nature and the creative impulse of the artist.⁴³³

Was abstract painting expressing something of the world? What was its meaning, what cause did it have for signification? For modernists like Read and Leepa, the answer was yes, and non-representational art maintained an *empathic* link to the natural realm. While *empathy* was not a term frequently utilized by Painters Eleven, the modernist ideas that define the term were most certainly internalized by the group. Broadly speaking, *empathy* refers to the intuitive—or emotive—engagement of an artwork with the forces of the physical, natural world. Painters Eleven’s comprehension of the value of *empathy* as a visual quality of painting operates within the sphere of art-critical discourse arising again out of Herbert Read’s texts. For Read, *empathy* refers to the notion that art is produced out of a creative relationship between nature and the artist, and thus art is not just a result of its dependency on nature but is also the product of art and nature’s complete fusion and permeation.⁴³⁴ The concept relies on the idea of *expression*, that

⁴³³ For more about Read on *empathy*, see Ben Cranfield, “‘A stimulation to greater effort of living’: The Importance of Henry Moore’s ‘credible compromise’ to Herbert Read’s Aesthetics and Politics,” in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity* (London: Tate Research Publication, 2015), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/ben-cranfield-a-stimulation-to-greater-effort-of-living-the-importance-of-henry-moores-r1151301> (accessed September 10, 2016).

⁴³⁴ Read himself is also drawing from Wilhelm Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, translated from German in 1908. See David Thistlewood, *Herbert Read: Formlessness and Form: An Introduction to His Aesthetics* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1984); and David Thistlewood, “Herbert Read’s Organic Aesthetic [1]. See also *ibid.*

observers are able to project their own emotional response onto works of art, but *empathy* further posits that such responses are possible because the viewer is able to perceive in the work the underlying life forces inherent in the natural world. For Read, to produce this *empathic* reaction is the very purpose of art. Crucially for Read, as scholar David Thistlewood has pointed out, it was possible that abstracted works of art, by “emphasizing the vital forces of nature through exaggeration or distortion” and extracting from nature its “essential formal potencies,” could elicit such an *empathic* response.⁴³⁵ As Thistlewood explains, Read was sure that art “intuitively avoids an *exact* observation of the laws of natural morphology” but rather that art produces a “passage from perception to intuition, and carrying with it a heightened mode of consciousness,” meaning that for Read, *empathy* was to be measured by “the degree to which the artist interpenetrated his work with the laws of the natural world.”⁴³⁶ Nature, which Read calls “absolute and universal”⁴³⁷ thus became the criteria and principle for all art, it is the artist in particular who carries the impulse to transmit, by the creation of *form*, the natural realm into the artwork.

Not surprisingly, another voice in this discourse of *empathy* was that of Hans Hofmann. The impact of Hofmann’s own teachings and views on modern art and abstract painting, from the moment of his arrival in the United States, cannot be overstated—although scholars routinely acknowledge Hofmann’s importance in the development of

⁴³⁵ Thistlewood, “Herbert Read’s Organic Aesthetic [I], 228; and Thistlewood, *Herbert Read*, 44.

⁴³⁶ Thistlewood, *Herbert Read: Formlessness and Form*, 48.

⁴³⁷ Herbert Read, “Art and Crisis” (1944) republished in Read, *The Grass Roots of Art* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1947), 77–78.

American Abstract Expressionism, Hofmann's theorizations about the flatness of the picture plane, the integrity of the two-dimensional surface, and the self-criticality of the medium, are too often credited absolutely to the art critic Clement Greenberg.⁴³⁸

Hofmann elaborated on his particular interpretation of *empathy* in his publication *Search for the Real* (1948), where the term is used to describe: "the gift of discerning the mystery of each thing through its own intrinsic life." In this life, Hofmann continues, "an intuitive artist discovers the emotive and vital substance which makes a work of art."⁴³⁹ Like Read, Hofmann emphasizes "vitality" as the life force of the natural world—"the source of all inspiration...[and] creative impulses"—which is transposed into painting as a configuration of qualities of formal and spatial relations, and Hofmann claims that the "artist's power of empathy" is "to feel the intrinsic qualities of the medium of expression" in order to bring the medium "to life."⁴⁴⁰ The claim to aesthetic autonomy is evident in his words: "The work of art is firmly established as an independent object; this makes it a picture. Outside of it is the outer world. Inside of it, the world of an artist."⁴⁴¹ *Empathy*

⁴³⁸ In 1945 Greenberg recognized the debt he owed to Hofmann's 1938–39 lectures on modern art. Charles Harrison has pointed out that Greenberg's own formulations were in part drawn from the teachings and writings of Hofmann, who in the 1940s argued that the "three-dimensional effect" in painting is possible "without destroying [the] flat surface...[and] the preservation of two-dimensionality." This Greenberg would come to call "the integrity of the picture plane" in his 1960 essay "Modernist Painting." See Harrison, *Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 55; and Greenberg, "Modernist Painting."

⁴³⁹ Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 54.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

therefore is the artist's ability to perceive the vital and often hidden forces of the natural world, as well as his or her creative impulse to capture, communicate, and *express* these essential forces through *form*. It also endows the artist with a mystical faculty of metaphysical perception, transcendental awareness, and intuitive creativity.

A complex network of critical terms and concepts are at play here, all of which feed into and permeate Painters Eleven's modernist discourse. This is evident in the case of Gordon, who believes that modern, "progressive" art is charged with the task of elevating the cultural tastes and social values of her local Hamilton. Embedded into her articulations are a series of modernist assumptions about the communicative and expressive powers of abstracted forms in painting, and these assumptions or principles can be linked to contemporary ideas and philosophies that were circulating within mid-century artistic and critical discourse through influential figures such as Read and Hofmann. Gordon's participation in this discourse can best be understood as a layering of each principle, beginning with the visual mechanisms of *empathy* and *expression* which connect the artist to the natural world and to the viewer through the faculties of perception and creation. Since Gordon's mid-century view of nature was from a metaphysical perspective, she employed the technique of "push and pull" to *empathically* communicate the transcendental properties of the universe into the non-figurative picture. However, the transmission of this new awareness is contingent upon the presence of an ideal spectator who, in a modernist framework, is a disembodied gaze, an observing eye lifted out of the specificities of time, history, and place.⁴⁴² The problem facing Gordon

⁴⁴² See Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

were the inadequate, uncooperative spectators of “Steeltown” Hamilton, who were so entrenched in the “MATERIAL” realm—in precisely the socio-economic particularities of their time, history, and place—that the mechanism linking aesthetic form to viewer’s consciousness could not be realized. As such her complaint rests upon the assumption of the ideal modernist spectator whose disembodied eye would receive, from her abstract painting, a dematerialized consciousness of nature and the universe.

Additionally, Gordon further observes that in Hamilton’s manufacturing socio-economic matrix, the city’s social identity is also shaped by the masculinized character of industrial work, creating a gendered discursive structure within which the battle for “progressive” art is framed by Gordon’s position as an older woman artist. In an environment built upon the unyielding austerity of steelwork and the vigor of manufacturing labor, Gordon notices that materiality and mass-production is inscribed with the qualities of masculinity, physical exertion, and durability. The frustration that Gordon expresses in her letter to McCurry, then, is also directed towards her own socio-historical condition as a woman in a place tied to a framework of industry—a condition which, Gordon suggests, is weighted with certain assumptions or attitudes regarding her gender. Gordon faced these “up-hill” challenges despite her nearly thirty-year career at the Hamilton Technical Institute, a school for art and technical science education that was an administrative amalgamation of the Hamilton Art School and the Board of Education’s technical school that took place in the 1910s. While Gordon is not specific about the nature or extent of her experience with any discriminatory barriers or hindrances, it is clear that she feels that the reach of her artistic ambition has been constrained by the male-dominated, industry-oriented forces around her. Indeed, Gordon’s professional

career was locked into Hamilton's push for development in technical and trade education. Gordon joined the Hamilton Art School at the cusp of its conversion into a technical institution, where art programs were subsequently aimed at commercial application and practice, and where Gordon taught courses in principles of design for students who were training for work in textile, ceramic, print, and woodworking industries. This is not to claim or speculate that Gordon was discontent or resentful of her teaching position, but rather to consider the extent to which Hamilton's identity as a manufacturing city determined Gordon's environment and thus informed her remarks about the battle for abstraction.

Nor, however, does this suggest that Gordon's social environment changed dramatically when she joined Painters Eleven. It must be acknowledged that while she found support for her artistic crusade in her abstract-painting peers, Gordon's struggle for a professional artist identity was not necessarily resolved by proxy in the wake of Painters Eleven's successes, and indeed her under-recognition persisted in spite of her involvement with the group. Like fellow woman-artist member Alexandra Luke, it is likely that Gordon's social position as a married, wealthy older woman overshadowed her professional status as an internationally-exhibited artist, even among Painters Eleven. It would be mistaken and misguided to assume that the coming together and collaboration of the group presupposed an equal regard among all eleven members, or that their formation somehow neutralized any social, cultural, or gendered biases that might have affected their internal relationships. Later interviews with Tom Hodgson and William Ronald would reveal that Hortense Gordon may not have been taken seriously by certain members due to her age and gender. When asked to comment on Gordon on two separate

occasions, once in 1979, and another in 1990, Hodgson simply and dismissively stated: “Hortense—A grand old lady,” and “I thought Hortense Gordon was a really nice old lady,”⁴⁴³ respectively. Ronald in 1977 referred to Gordon as “a funky old painter who always used to remind me of a chandelier,” adding, “you know she was Singer sewing machine money.”⁴⁴⁴ While the latter claim regarding her family lineage is unconfirmed, and while it is also unclear what Ronald means by his “chandelier” attribution, there is an evident connotation—that in Ronald’s eyes, Gordon was a wealthy old woman with a certain eccentric style that perhaps bordered on the gaudy.

On the other hand, Ray Mead and Harold Town have offered more thoughtful and personal assertions of Gordon’s serious contributions to abstract painting in Canada. Ray Mead was closest to Gordon, the two having met in 1949. Mead makes the case for Gordon’s sincere generosity and commitment to sharing her knowledge with other artists in Hamilton and Toronto. He states:

[Gordon] showed me ways of thinking that hadn’t occurred to me...she was a marvelous person...she got very little reward out of it, but she believed in what she did...[H]er whole house was full of...[books], good Japanese prints...You could just sit at the table and go through

⁴⁴³ Tom Hodgson, interviewed by Joan Murray, 29 January 1979, typed transcript, Tom Hodgson File, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

⁴⁴⁴ This claim regarding Gordon’s family background is unconfirmed. William Ronald, interviewed by Joan Murray, 31 May 1977, typed transcript, William Ronald File, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

books you weren't able to afford to buy....She was the one who got me to send to [the Canadian National Exhibition] show...And that sort of established me with other people that I got to know there, [like Harold Town and Walter Yarwood].⁴⁴⁵

Harold Town, in his catalogue introduction to Gordon's last solo exhibition at Toronto's Gallery Moos in February 1961, also describes her as a pioneer of abstract painting in Canada.⁴⁴⁶ In his memorial tribute to Gordon after her death in 1963, Town characterizes Gordon's cultural achievement with a political weightiness and forceful strength that subverts the narrative of the soft and passive "nice old lady." Town writes: "she saw herself as the official opposition, never as the government, but like most opposition parties in parliament she lived to see the government adopt many of her beliefs....Hortense Gordon was for doing things and she did them."⁴⁴⁷ These competing social and professional identities reveal once again the internal frictions and incohesions within Painters Eleven's intra-relationships. Thus although Painters Eleven offered a zone of mutual respect for each other as individuals with the same goal for abstract painting, their formation did not necessarily or automatically create an equal social or professional footing for all eleven members.

⁴⁴⁵ Ray Mead, interviewed by Joan Murray, 4 September 1977, typed transcript, Ray Mead File, Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

⁴⁴⁶ Harold Town, *Hortense Gordon Exhibition* (Toronto: Gallery Moos, 1961), n.p.

⁴⁴⁷ Town, quoted in Inglis, "Hortense M. Gordon," n.p.

What bound Painters Eleven together was not a natural cohesion but rather their shared desire to validate abstraction in Toronto, and as such they sought out ideas that asserted its meaning and relevance while also contextualizing these ideas within their spatio-temporal condition. Gordon's appropriation of Hans Hofmann's "push and pull," as well as the modernist ideologies regarding autonomy, elevation, and transcendence attached to it, is one such example. When she argued that abstraction was a "different plane" of aesthetic encounter that bridged the pictorial and metaphysical realms of space, she was drawing from Hofmann's concept of transmission—the transmission of nature's immaterial, intangible "vitality"—as well as the underlying theorizations of pictorial meaning through *empathy* and *expression* circulating modern art discourse, thus inserting Hofmann's European-American modernist discourse into the socio-economic framework of "Steeltown" Hamilton and the greater Ontario area. She expressly considered her role in Hamilton's manufacturing society to be one of cultural elevation and progressive awakening through abstract art. Her professional career as a teacher at Hamilton Technical Institute was one avenue through which she attempted to achieve this goal by trying to instill the lessons of Hofmann's spatial dynamics onto her students. Hers was a push (and pull) for an ideological aesthetic liberation, an untethering from the figurative representation and affirmation of Canada's industrial geographies, and an opening up to the universalism and metaphysicality of space.

The Space of Canadian Modernism

Space—and its relationship to humans and nature—was one of the major preoccupations of Hortense Gordon, Alexandra Luke, Kazuo Nakamura, and Jock

Macdonald. As in the case of Gordon, the idea of “space” was entangled within a network of significations. This network is one of the linchpins of Painters Eleven’s Canadian modernism. Constructed out of an amalgamation of modernist principles, scientific-technological knowledges, and transnational cultural ideologies, this particular modernist matrix revolves around the universalized “space” of aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual elevation. Here, the most important kind of “space” is the pictorial space of abstract painting because it alone bears the burden of bridging together the transformative outlooks of mid-century science and culture by transmitting these new perspectives onto the individual viewer. Within the framework of this dissertation, this positions “space” as another discursive strategy of “harmony.” “Harmony” brings together the dialogues of modernist artistic philosophy and cultural identity in mid-century Canada by connecting the transcendental properties of abstracted pictorial space to the elevated awareness of nature’s metaphysical and universal spaces beyond national borders. Crucially, this particular understanding of nature’s unseen and intangible forces is situated in a belief that mystical truths are hidden in both the innermost, microscopic secrets of matter and life on earth—the cellular and the atomic—and the outermost mysteries of an infinite universe—the celestial and the cosmic. Here, the links between art, human consciousness, and nature are constructed once again by Painters Eleven’s rhetoric as it weaves a network of meanings, all of which share a certain conceptualization of “space.” This idea of “space” is seen as a way of transcending visible reality to simultaneously access the unknown realms of the microscopic and the macrocosmic.

Hortense Gordon’s fusion of Hans Hofmann’s ideas into her own practice and philosophy is an example of how Painters Eleven’s perspective was permeated with

circulating modernist ideas, sources, and influences. Alexandra Luke was another Painters Eleven member who drew heavily from Hofmann's teachings and attempted their application in her painting. Both Jock Macdonald and Alexandra Luke had also attended the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts, Macdonald once in 1949, and Luke a number of times between 1947 and 1952. Luke especially held Hofmann's words and critiques in high regard. Her notebooks from the time she spent at the school are filled with extensive quotations and notes from class. The content of her notes range from lessons in formal composition to Hofmann's critiques on her painting, from teachings in the philosophies of modern art masters like Piet Mondrian to broad modernist approaches to art. In one entry from 1949, for example, Luke scrawled: "[Hofmann said]—need more imagination. be free, still a little too stiff. break up color, too flat." In another, she jotted down phrases such as "modern artist is so extremely conscious of the space," and "every work should...carry mystery of creation."⁴⁴⁸

Just as Gordon drew from Hofmann's "push and pull" to essentialize the world into intangible states of nature—like vitality and energy—rather than states of substance, so too did Alexandra Luke draw from the idea that abstract art reveals nature's transcendental realities, or what Hofmann referred to as its "mystery of creation." Luke also forged the connection between non-figurative forms of abstract painting and the cosmic discoveries of contemporary science and technology, and she often drew from the teachings and writings of Hofmann and other early-twentieth-century modern artists to do so. In an undated description of the painting *Space Computer*, likely written for an

⁴⁴⁸ Alexandra Luke, notes from the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Art, 1948–1952, Notebook #2, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

exhibition catalogue, Luke prepared the following statements about her work, and in it summed up the very foundation of “space” as intertwined with art, science, and nature:

The...abstract paintings by Alexandra Luke indicate the artist’s interest in the stupendous developments and discoveries in the many fields of science today... In “SPACE COMPUTER” [emphasis original] the artist suggests to the spectator a synthesis of space achievement of this amazing era in which we live...The act of creation animates the picture surface and the subconscious space concept proposes the composition. Thus the artist has through creative painting suggested man’s thrust into the unknown, beyond the planet earth, which is a mere beginning into the unprobed dimensions of the mind which our most audacious thoughts cannot yet conceive.⁴⁴⁹

Luke’s belief in the mystical and creative power of nature’s metaphysical forces is undeniable in this set of articulations. She is also convinced that the achievement of outerspace exploration is responsible for unlocking humanity’s knowledge of unknown realities, and for opening an awareness of the “unprobed dimensions of the mind.” Strangely, the title of her painting, *Space Computer*, appears to disavow the natural or organic, and instead makes reference to the new technology of the computer and its

⁴⁴⁹ Alexandra Luke, typed notes, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

mechanized, automated processing system.⁴⁵⁰ Rather than being a contradiction, however, Luke's statement harmonizes technology and creativity, proposing that scientific advancement can lead mankind to deeper truths about human consciousness and the creative spirit. Ruminating on the way that the artist can produce this dialogue in painting, Luke embeds the modernist idea of *empathy*, or the intuitive relationship between nature and artist, into her text, made explicit in her assertion that *Space Computer* "suggests to the spectator a synthesis of space achievement...the act of creation animates the picture surface and the subconscious space concept proposes the composition." According to Luke, the "subconscious space concept," or the new conceptualizations of outerspace and nature that are latent in the mind, is intuited by the artist and is transmitted onto the surface of the painting through composition. Luke maintains that she, as the sensitive artist, "synthesizes" her own heightened awareness of these cosmic dimensions—these "space achievements"—for the viewer by extracting the underlying mystical realities of nature and essentializing them into abstract forms. By 1956, titles such as *Universal Muse*, *Blue Sphere*, *Journey Through Space*, and *Macrocosmos* plainly declare this artistic responsibility. In the language of Herbert Read's *empathy*, steeped in modernist ideology, she has fulfilled the artist's creative impulse to transfer the vital forces of the natural realm into the work of art.

⁴⁵⁰ Computers had made their way into public knowledge by the 1950s. Automated computing played a major part in ending the Second World War in the deciphering of German enigma codes. In 1951 the first computer for commercial use, called the Universal Automatic Computer, was introduced to the public. In 1953 the International Business Machine (IBM) 650 and 700 series computers made their mark in the computer world.

In many ways, Luke's insistence on a cosmic and dynamic approach to nature is consistent with the themes of theosophy, energy, and vitality which were also central to earlier modernist discourses circulating in Canadian art and literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Like many of Canada's first abstract painters, including Kathleen Munn, Bertram Brooker, as well as Lawren Harris in the late 1930s, Luke was drawn to the religious mysticism of theosophy, and in particular the writings of P. D. Ouspensky.⁴⁵¹ Within this esoteric movement, non-representational art was linked to the idea of spiritual enlightenment as a divine unity or existential Oneness with God and all of creation. As Linda Dalrymple Henderson has also argued, crucial to the development of modern art in the early-twentieth-century was the conceptualization of space as beyond the immediate human perception in two forms—the curved spaces of non-Euclidean geometry and a transcendental “fourth dimension” of space.⁴⁵² Vorticists Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Herbert Read also endowed text and image with vitalism and dynamism in a fusion of art and technology, drawing on the metaphor of the vortex to describe and embrace the agitated, “blasting” energy of the modern machine-age in Britain during the First World

⁴⁵¹ See Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Cassandra Getty, Georgiana Uhlyarik, Lisa Daniels, Adam Lauder, and Sarah Stanners, *The Logic of Nature, The Romance of Space* (Windsor, Ont.: Art Gallery of Windsor and Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2010); Joan Murray, *Alexandra Luke, Continued Searching* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1987); Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape* (Toronto, Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981); and P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an unknown teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949).

⁴⁵² Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013).

War.⁴⁵³ This concept of energy gains a renewed and evolved meaning after the end of the Second World War, as the explosion of the atomic bomb, a renewed postwar interest in Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, and enhanced microscopic technology revived the public curiosity for an immaterial universe—or, as Tim Armstrong has put it, “a universe which could only be imagined.”⁴⁵⁴ Modernist invocations of energy in the postwar era carried with it a new set of scientific references, or new “visual and conceptual stimuli,” alongside the idea that conceptions of representation needed to follow suit by expanded its own pictorial fields of space.⁴⁵⁵

The postwar years in North America were reverberating with the birth of a new technological era. The denotation of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had given rise to the “Atomic Age,” a period marked by profound anxiety over the

⁴⁵³ Wyndham Lewis, ed., *BLAST* (1914). See Reed Way Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). See also Sarah Stanners, “‘The dust gets in our eyes’: Marshall McLuhan, Wyndham Lewis, and COUNTERBLAST,” in Getty, Uhlyarik, Daniels, Lauder, and Stanners, *The Logic of Nature, The Romance of Space*, 106–162.

⁴⁵⁴ Tim Armstrong, “The Vibrating World: Science, Spiritualism, Technology, in *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity, 2005), 116. Armstrong also refers to a number of other discoveries such as non-Euclidian geometry, quantum physics, and radioactivity.

⁴⁵⁵ See also Bruce Clark and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science, Art, and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); and Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Kevin L. Stayton, *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940–1960* (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001).

Cold War conflict and the threat of nuclear extinction.⁴⁵⁶ Knowledge of the destructive potential of this modern technological weapon, made visible and visual through the circulation of photographs of atomic blasts and mushroom clouds, was widespread.⁴⁵⁷ The spirit of the postwar period are epitomized by the extremes of atomic energy's paradoxical potential—while it expressed an optimism of technological progress and an engineering triumph, it also represented the threat of armageddon and annihilation. At once a milestone in the history of human achievement as well as violence, the nuclear era was described by the University of Alberta's C. R. Tracy as mankind's "doubtful blessing."⁴⁵⁸ Canada was also under the shadow of the atomic bomb. In 1957, Canadian and American militaries joined in the organization of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), an early alert and protection system designed to warn both nations of aerospace intrusions over North America. In Calgary, precautions took the form of Operation "Lifesaver," a major evacuation exercise for the city in preparation for a

⁴⁵⁶ For more on politics, society, and culture in Canada during the Cold War, see Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of an Insecurity State, 1945–1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt, *Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2003); and Richard Cavell, ed. *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁴⁵⁷ See John O'Brian, *Camera Atomica* (London and Toronto: Black Dog Publishing and the Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015), and John O'Brian and Jeremy Borsos, *Atomic Postcards: Radioactive Messages from the Cold War* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁴⁵⁸ Quoted in L.B. Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939–1967* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 155.

possible nuclear attack that was trialed in September 1955.⁴⁵⁹ Covered by national media outlets including *Maclean's*, *Time Magazine*, and *Toronto Telegram*, the trial execution of the plan, from the initial alarm to the journey of evacuees to receiving communities as well as the return home, was also documented by the National Film Board and aired on the CBC.

Together with the later development of the “Space Age,” which began officially with the Soviet Union’s launch of the first artificial satellite Sputnik in 1957, the Atomic Age injected science and technology into mass culture and everyday life. Reflections and considerations of the role of science in shaping the world became a pervasive element in both Canadian and American societies. As L.B. Kuffert points out, one such consideration includes the radio programme *In the Shadow of the Bomb*, broadcast in Canada on New Year’s Day, 1950. The programme offered a retrospective on mid-century culture as a culmination of fifty years of advancements in transportation, medicine, and communications. In the broadcast, the narrator states: “In this world of 1950 there is almost nothing which is not the work of science, and the prestige of science is so great that almost nothing can succeed without it.”⁴⁶⁰ In 1951 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired *Living in the Atomic Age*, a six-part series of lectures by British philosopher Bertrand Russell in which Russell encouraged the embrace of scientific technology in modern life. The series, produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), was also aired by the American Broadcasting Company

⁴⁵⁹ Frances Reilly examines this exercise in detail in “Operation ‘Lifesaver’”: Canadian Atomic Culture and Cold War Civil Defence,” *Past Imperfect* 14 (2008): 46–85.

⁴⁶⁰ Quoted in Kuffert, *A Great Duty*, 155–156.

(ABC) in the United States in 1953.⁴⁶¹

Luke often borrowed ideas regarding contemporary scientific discovery from Jock Macdonald, who in 1952 gave a lecture at the opening of the first exhibition of Canadian Abstract painting organized by Luke at the Oshawa Adelaide House. Entitled “Today’s Art Reflects *New* Concept of Nature,” the essay’s points of departure were the recent developments in science and technology which had radically altered the ways in which man understood its relationship with nature and the universe. In this address, Macdonald states:

Until [the modern age] the atom was considered the rockbottom of creation, and this belief was reflected in solid and objective art, but, the atom is split and instead of solid matter, the scientists find a nucleus of energies...The removal of the solidity is a reflection of the refutation of the solidity of the atom. In the field of engineering or invention man has released himself from solid contact with earth by flying off into space. It is the artist’s problem to portray this space and motion...astonishing the uninitiated [with] space and time elements in painting today...indigestible to many laymen.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Jock Macdonald, “Today’s Art Reflects New Concept of Nature,” *Daily Times-Gazette Oshawa*, October 17, 1952, n.p. Joan Murray Artists Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

For Macdonald, feats of engineering that allowed humans to escape the solid, material epistemologies of Earth, and the splitting of the atom was by far the most phenomenal of these achievements in its reduction of matter to pure energy. These events also had tremendous consequences for artistic production. “All art,” Macdonald continues, “is an expression of man’s consciousness, and as he adopts a new concept of nature so, in turn is it reflected in creative art.” According to Macdonald, art must communicate this unbounded human consciousness by liberating its form and aesthetic from the constraints of figuration, illusionism, and perspective. “Our concepts about nature, space, and time have brought into being a new form of consciousness,” he goes on to argue. “The abstract artist is expressing his inner vision of this new form of awareness.”⁴⁶³ Alexandra Luke repeats Macdonald’s passage nearly verbatim in a transcript for a lecture given in November 1958, stressing the atomic bomb’s disintegration of solidity as the essential characteristic of matter and space exploration’s disavowal of human dependence on Earth’s material presence. In her lecture, she adds a consideration of how the innovations of “modern architecture” reflect this “new concept of space” by “dispos[ing] with the solidity of walls and giv[ing] us partitions of glass,” and how “it is the artists problem to portray this [new] space and motion.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ *1952 YWCA Canadian Abstract Exhibition* (Oshawa: YWCA, 1951), n.p.

⁴⁶⁴ Transcript of lecture “Non Figurative Painting” given by Alexandra Luke (location unspecified), November 1958, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

Ian Thom has previously taken note of Macdonald's deep concern for the production of art which draws from universal truths, elicited from an in-depth, spiritual study of nature and an awareness of a greater form of consciousness.⁴⁶⁵ Citing Macdonald's 1940 Vancouver lecture entitled "Art in Relation to Nature," Thom argues that Macdonald's written desire to "achieve values beyond the material" in his work can be found throughout his oils of the 1930s. Similar to Alexandra Luke, the titles of Macdonald's paintings, like *Nature's Pattern*, *Celestial Dance*, and *Transitory Clay* point to Macdonald's ever-long pursuit of spiritual study of nature's spaces, events, and energies. A 1954 work on paper, *Nature's Pattern* [Fig. 35], provides a glimpse of this inner vision as a central structure with radiating energetic lines and their interior components of cilia-like growths, vibrating with an energy which suggests more than mere geometry. Art historian Ihor Holubizky has observed that Kazuo Nakamura's paintings of the 1950s—*Suspended Interior*, *Inner Movement*, *Inner View*, *Inner Expansion*, and *Into Space*—also allude, both in title and in form, to the search for "cosmic insight" or mystical truth, to the "unseeable, or unknowable."⁴⁶⁶ Macdonald argued that such artistic expression "cannot help itself evolving—it is the art which is the

⁴⁶⁵ Ian M. Thom, "The Early Work: An Artist Emerges," in *Jock Macdonald: Evolving Form*, eds. Michelle Jacques, Linda Jansma, and Ian M. Thom, 15–38 (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), 15. See also Joyce Zemans, *Jock Macdonald: The Inner Landscape* (Toronto, Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1981).

⁴⁶⁶ Ihor Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," in Ihor Holubizky, ed., *Kazuo Nakamura: The Method of Nature*, 9–23 (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 12.

conscious expression of our time.”⁴⁶⁷ These “new concepts of nature” that are on Macdonald’s mind, as well as the significance of how the contemporary moment can transform an artist’s perception of the universe, reveal a modernism in Macdonald’s artistic ideas that is rooted in his belief that advancements in abstract painting are producing a cultural parallel to a liberating, international scientific progress.

There is both a spatial as well as a temporal awareness present in Macdonald’s advocacy of abstraction, as well as in Hortense Gordon and Alexandra Luke’s rhetoric of progress and elevation above tangibility and physical materiality. Like Hortense Gordon’s perception of Hamilton’s industry-based ideologies which inhibit her ability “rise above the MATERIAL,” Jock Macdonald and Alexandra Luke believe that modern innovations in art are tied to, and indeed are contingent upon, parallel transformations in their immediate culture and society. Painters Eleven’s confidence in their avant-garde status, evident in their anti-manifesto declaration that “there is no jury but time,” was founded upon a perceptible shifting of attitudes towards ideas about Canadian cultural identity and artistic production after World War II, which was framed within a set of seemingly disparate distinctions between tradition and newness, landscape and abstraction, and provincial and international. Macdonald was convinced that the emergence of a Canadian abstract language would propel the nation into an international spotlight, allowing Canadian artists to unite with others through the universal aesthetic language of space.⁴⁶⁸ The abstract “idiom” that Painters Eleven speak in their painting,

⁴⁶⁷ Macdonald quoted in Thom, “The Early Work,” 15.

⁴⁶⁸ See Chapter Four.

Macdonald wrote, “is the only idiom that will go over here [in Europe].”⁴⁶⁹ As Hortense Gordon also observed, conservatism in the greater Toronto area created a barrier in attitude and ideology that prevented this kind of universality from being achieved within Canada, which also inhibited the liberation of an artistic consciousness to parallel the same liberation that science had accomplished for mankind. “The critics weren’t with us,” Macdonald stated scornfully, “but someday they will have to eat their words—no doubt about that.”⁴⁷⁰

In the desire to bridge the spatio-geographic gap between Canada and the world through art, Painters Eleven found an answer in the push and pull of harmonious disagreement between these binary dialectics. For Macdonald, Luke, Gordon, and Nakamura, another set of contradictions is brought to bear on this framework, once again to be smoothed out by the ideological work of harmony - the extremes of the microscopic and the macrocosmic, both beyond the scope of human imagination and bridged together by the transcendental faculties of “space.” Alexandra Luke articulates this idea in a lecture she gave in 1958: “the artist’s own intuition...brings man face to face with that share of the infinite which he carries within himself, and which seeks its reflection in his fellow men.”⁴⁷¹ Luke is convinced that, by reaching outwards into the universe and its hidden, infinite depths, humankind can look inward and gain a mystical knowledge of its

⁴⁶⁹ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 25 August 1955, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

⁴⁷⁰ Correspondence from Jock Macdonald to William Ronald, 9 May 1955, R2113, Box 52, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

⁴⁷¹ Alexandra Luke, “Non Figurative Painting,” lecture transcript, November 1958, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

innermost spiritual truths. Nakamura's paintings, too, appear to be "expressing an essential (and dualistic) character of nature, the infinitesimal and the expansive."⁴⁷²

Throughout the 1950s Kazuo Nakamura produced an extensive range of work that warrants close analysis in its own right. This "astonishing" range, Ihor Holubizky notes, includes landscapes in watercolour in oil; still life paintings; *inner structure* abstractions; and *block structure* or *prairie tower* spatial illusionary paintings, among others.⁴⁷³ Two prime examples of the extremes of this range are *Inner View* (1954) [Fig. 36] and *Suspension* (1956) [Fig. 37]. *Inner View*, like most of Nakamura's *inner structure* abstractions is a bichromatic picture, featuring web-like patterns of thin black lines spread across the surface of a blank white canvas. The webbings are denser in some areas than others, but each cluster is connected by the fibrous sinews. Each thread is formed with straight-edged precision. Despite the mathematical quality of this linearity, the overall form is rhythmic. Each line ebbs and flows in weight, width, pressure, and texture within one stroke of the brush, giving a sense of animation and organic current to the lattice. Nakamura executes a composition that balances geometric precision against structural indeterminacy, as though communicating the unknown forces of biology that allow for both genetic reproductive accuracy and organic adaptability. Holubizky refers to this co-existence of consistency and variability as "the method of nature." As an example of this "method," Holubizky looks at the form of a spider's web. A spider's web, he observes, must always be gridded in structure but the particular pattern, shape, and dimensions of any given web is open to endless adjustments and mutations based on site

⁴⁷² Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," 14.

⁴⁷³ Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," 11.

conditions. As such these *inner structure* paintings “could be magnified views of cellular decay” but also could be fabric, or “architectural plans in disarray” in their suggestion of some kind of matrix, both settled and unsettled, fixed and unfixed.⁴⁷⁴

On the other hand, *Suspension* makes a leap into illusionary space and three-dimensional figuration. Known as the *block structure* or *prairie tower* paintings, this series features architectural towers made of stacks of hard-edged cubes, set against an eerie, deserted landscape of blue-teal ground and black sky. Similar to the uncanny landscapes of 1930s European Surrealism, the architectural structures in Nakamura’s *Suspension* rise up imposingly into the air and cast lonely, elongated shadows against a barren ground. Three-dimensional modeling is also reduced exclusively to the extremes of black and white, which imbues the edifices with a looming presence and mysterious aura as each cube is suspended in empty space. The geometric rigidity of the architecture and the trichromatic polar contrasts in value produce a cold, inhospitable, and above all alien atmosphere, “as if... painted on the moon.”⁴⁷⁵ This last point makes an interesting case for the idea of “space” as an aesthetic representation of both the inner world of nature’s secrets and the outer world of the astronomical universe. In *Suspension* Nakamura produces a visual language that is antithetical to *Inner View*. Instead of probing the mysteriously mathematical yet also organic forces of nature and biology, *Suspension* offers only the otherworldly, sterile, and lifeless. How can these formal

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 13–14.

⁴⁷⁵ Gary Michael Dault, “The Alternative Eden: A Primer of Canadian Abstraction,” in *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada*, eds. Robert Bringham, Geoffrey James, Russell Keziere and Doris Shadbolt (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 89. Also cited in Holubizky, “Nakamura: The Method of Nature,” 17.

extremes be mediated in terms of “space”? Nakamura offers his own harmonizing approach.

On his *block structure* paintings, Nakamura stated that his landscapes were “based on today’s external form of orderliness...brought about by man’s expanding observation and application of various sciences.”⁴⁷⁶ Nakamura furthermore believed that “art and science are exploring the universe on a parallel level,” and thus “the images or concept the artist produces are the same as the scientific concepts of that period.”⁴⁷⁷ This last point is crucial for this discussion of space. For Nakamura, art must communicate the same revelations as scientific innovation. From the *inner* views of intricate, painterly webbings to the alien-scapes of stoic infinite space, Nakamura’s paintings articulate the dualistic explorations being carried out by science in the midcentury, in conjunction with photography—the field ion microscope which in 1951 allowed for the first direct observations and photographs of individual atoms, and the launching of first space research rocket in 1946 which resulted in the first pictures of Earth from beyond the atmosphere. Both were major milestones in human achievement. Thus when faced with the clashing formal languages of *Inner View* and *Suspension*, the two thematically opposed and dissociated abstract practices may actually be bridged by their interest in communicating the intangible qualities of nature’s microcosmic and macrocosmic spaces.

⁴⁷⁶ *Kingston Whig-Standard*, October 18, 1960, cited in Holubizky, “Nakamura: The Method of Nature,” 18.

⁴⁷⁷ Nakamura, quoted in Robert Fulford, “The New World of Pattern,” *Mayfair* (February 1954): n.p.

As such Nakamura's paintings articulate the unknown phenomena of nature's binary character—"the infinitesimal and the expansive," as Holubizky puts it.⁴⁷⁸

Nakamura often suggested that atomic and cosmic structures had "something in common," an underlying order that he referred to as a "fundamental universal pattern in all art and nature."⁴⁷⁹ For evidence that Nakamura was interested in the invisible forces of nature made visible by technological advancements of his own time, one need look no further than a photograph of Nakamura posing with an open copy of the June 1957 issue of *Scientific American* [Fig. 38], which features an article by Erwin W. Müller, inventor of the field ion microscope.⁴⁸⁰ *Scientific American* was a staple for Nakamura, who believed that the magazine "was more worthwhile than going through art magazines" to define art for himself.⁴⁸¹ The image on the cover of the issue, entitled "Atoms Visualized" is a microscopic photograph of the chemical element tungsten [Fig. 39], seen from above—that is, from the perspective of one looking down at the atom through a microscope. "With this tool," Müller writes in the article, "we can watch the fascinating changes in a metal crystal as atoms are added or torn out of the lattice."⁴⁸² The visual field of the microscopic photograph is a crystalline structure of radial symmetry, with

⁴⁷⁸ Holubizky, "Nakamura: The Method of Nature," 14.

⁴⁷⁹ Nakamura, quoted in Robert Fulford, "The New World of Pattern," *Mayfair* (February 1954): n.p.

⁴⁸⁰ Undated photograph, Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

⁴⁸¹ Kazuo Nakamura, interviewed by Joan Murray, 12 June 1979, typed transcript, Kazuo Nakamura File, Joan Murray Artist Files, Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

⁴⁸² Erwin W. Müller, "Atoms Visualized," *Scientific American* 196:6 (June 1957).

each “arm” sprouting from a central disc and culminating in a rounded bulb at its tip. Each form radiates with concentric ripples. Minute particles cover the rest of the image to create a ridged texture. Through this manipulation of perspective, the tungsten atom is revealed to have a living pattern that follows the “method of nature.” Perhaps Nakamura saw in this image a revelation that nature’s innermost secrets are as visually otherworldly as the celestial heavens themselves.

Significantly, this new image of the atom is radically different from the well-known diagrammatic model of the atom, devised by Ernest Rutherford and Niels Bohr in 1913 but made popular by “Atomic Age” design from 1940–1960. Known as the Rutherford-Bohr model, the symbol was appropriated by the United States Atomic Energy Commission as its logo [Fig. 40], and its formal parts—spherical clusters, molecular rings, zooming particles, and boomerang shapes—featured heavily “futuristic” motifs in architecture, industrial and interior design and other mass media and consumer products.⁴⁸³ As cultural markers of the optimistic spirit of the postwar era, popular interest in nuclear technology also coincided with the Space Age and its enthusiasm for aerospace exploration. Indeed, their motifs were often blended together in graphic design.

⁴⁸³ See Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Kevin Stayton, *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940–1960* (Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001), Marc Arceneaux, *Atomic Age: Art and design of the fifties* (Troubadour Design Resource Series, 1975), Joan Marter, “Abstract Sculpture of the Atomic Age,” in *Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949–1960*, by Megan M. Fontanella, Flavia Frigeri, Tracey Bashkoff, and Joan Marter, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2012), 59–67. See also O’Brian, *Camera Atomica*; and O’Brian and Borsos, *Atomic Postcards: Radioactive Messages from the Cold War*.

Atomic-inspired orb and ring patterns were visually compatible—and even conflatable—with the star, orbit, galaxy, and rocket iconography of Space Age design, which was infused with the upward energy and momentum of flight and outerspace. Together with the Rutherford-Bohr atomic model, the imagery of the Space Age captured the imagination of the public as an expression of the future, the progress and promise of science and technology, and the seemingly infinite possibilities of a postwar world. This optimism was paradoxically paired with the threat of nuclear armageddon and human extinction.⁴⁸⁴ This reveals an integrated fascination with the extremes of scientific exploration—from atoms to galaxies, molecules to stars, in the postwar age humankind was delving into the most minute, imperceptible, and microscopic while also launching into the infinite vastness of the cosmos.

From this perspective, Nakamura's interest in the “Atoms Visualized” picture on the cover of *Scientific American* is evidence of a broader postwar cultural spirit, which perceives the existence of an essential similarity between nature's smallest and largest spaces. While the microscopic photograph provides a documentary visualization of the composition of the atom, offering a radically different and newly textured dimension to the simplified Rutherford-Bohr diagram, both images lead to the same conclusion for Nakamura. Atomic and cosmic structures had “something in common,” an underlying order that Nakamura referred to as a “fundamental universal pattern in all art and

⁴⁸⁴ See O'Brian, *Camera Atomica*.

nature.”⁴⁸⁵ The orbed and rippling appearance of the infinitesimal tungsten atoms, in their formal likeness to that of stars, planets, and galaxies, revealed the primal design and inner workings of the entirety of the universe. For Nakamura, this veiled secret of the cosmos, which was previously invisible and hidden from human knowledge for centuries, was finally perceptible and observable in the twentieth century thanks to science and technology. For Nakamura, however, the astounding ramifications of this new knowledge on humanity and human consciousness needed to be mediated and entered into public awareness through the engaged and intuitive modern artist. As Holubizky argues, Nakamura’s paintings allude to the idea that the meaning and “method” of nature cannot be “unravelling” by scientific exactness or analytical precision alone, except in conjunction with the inner creative processes of the human spirit.⁴⁸⁶ As such, the organicism of *Inner View* and the cold geometry of *Suspension* may be harmonized in their exploration of nature’s anatomical expression in both microscopic and macrocosmic forms.

Nakamura’s statements on the essential relationship between art and science, in which he declares that the two disciplines “are exploring the universe on a parallel level” dovetail with those made by Alexandra Luke and Jock Macdonald. Both artists insist on the artist’s intuitive role in connecting art and science through nature, that since “our concepts about nature, space, and time have brought into being a new form of

⁴⁸⁵ Holubizky, 14; and Nakamura as quoted in Fulford, “The New World of Pattern,” n.p., and Kazuo Nakamura undated statement, Art Gallery of Hamilton Permanent Collection files, as cited in Holubizky, 14.

⁴⁸⁶ Holubizky is referring to is the title of American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1841 address *The Method of Nature*.

consciousness...the abstract artist is expressing his inner vision of this new form of awareness.” That Nakamura’s ideas are aligned with Macdonald’s should come as no surprise. Nakamura was a student of Macdonald’s at the Vancouver Technical School from 1940–1942, during which time Macdonald gave his Vancouver lecture entitled “Art in Relation to Nature”—one of Macdonald’s first articulations of the notion that the modern artist holds a transcendental intuition of the universal truths inherent in nature, and that abstract art expresses these spiritual truths.⁴⁸⁷ It is not unreasonable to presume that Nakamura would have also taken part in Macdonald’s microscopic slide lectures. According to Barbara Macdonald in an interview with Joan Murray, Jock owned a collection of microscopic images in the form of slides and would use them in his art classes as a “decoy” for modern artworks. To demonstrate abstract painting’s formal connection to the natural world, Macdonald would project a slide of a microscopic organism. After students had commented on the beauty of the painting before them, he would reveal that they were not looking at a painting but at a microscopic photograph.⁴⁸⁸ Former student Thelma Van Alstyne recalls that this revelation would inspire students’ visual imagination. “Slides of acid drops,” for example, “resembled butterfly wings” and would thus suggest the “beautiful imagery as subject matter for paintings.”⁴⁸⁹

Such ideas about the relationship between an artist’s contemporary moment and visual expression are tied to an influence from the avant-garde painter and photographer

⁴⁸⁷ See Thom, “The Early Work: An Artist Emerges,” 15.

⁴⁸⁸ Barbara Macdonald, interviewed by Joan Murray, 25 May 1977, Toronto, typed transcript, Digital Archives, Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa, Canada.

⁴⁸⁹ Zemans, *The Inner Landscape*, 228.

Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. Macdonald regarded Moholy-Nagy's book *Vision in Motion*, published in 1947, to be of considerable importance, and selected the book for students like William Ronald to read. Perhaps Macdonald found inspiration for his microscopic slide strategy in Moholy-Nagy's experiments in photography and optics, as seen in this page from *Vision in Motion* that reproduces an "electron micrograph" of a minute grain of face powder, enlarged 25,000 times [Figs. 41–42].⁴⁹⁰ "Magnifications," the caption reads, "opens up new fields of visual presentation, visual possibilities, for a psychological transformation of our vision." Like the new atomic world that is revealed on the cover of *Scientific American*, Moholy-Nagy's electron micrograph challenges the eye's understanding of the shape and structure of the universe and its objects. More compelling still, *Vision in Motion* puts forth the idea that the sciences and the arts have a common goal in the search for the expression of life, and that where the scientist pursues this expression through intellect, the artist pursues it through creativity. Moholy-Nagy insists on the significance of an artist's awareness of his temporal and geographic placement in the world, stating, "the contemporary artist organizes his work within his given historical and cultural framework, but he derives his subject matter from his social and spiritual interests."⁴⁹¹ In *Vision in Motion*, Moholy-Nagy describes the concept of "space-time" in terms of "the cultural lag of this physical and emotional insight that much of the violent reaction against the newness and 'unintelligibility' of modern art can be properly understood."⁴⁹² These ideas are shared by Macdonald, whose understanding of art as "the

⁴⁹⁰ László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: P. Theobald, 1947), 206.

⁴⁹¹ Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 28.

⁴⁹² Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 115.

conscious expression of our time”⁴⁹³ is situated within his own geographic-temporal position in Toronto in the 1950s, and aimed at dismantling the spatial and temporal lag of conservatism and the parochial.

Macdonald’s mature abstract works of the later 1950s grapple with this quest to express the new form of consciousness that, in Macdonald’s words, has been brought about by new concepts about nature, space, and time, to be reflected in creative art. Titles like *Celestial Dance* (1959), *Nature Evolving* (1960), and *Flood Tide* (1957) point to Macdonald’s long pursuit of spiritual study of nature’s spaces, energies, and events, and their visual forms also explore the invisible energies of the universe. *Nature Evolving* [Fig. 43] evokes a growth of plant-like, but unrecognizable organic forms, the boundaries of which appear not to melt or blend into each other, but rather to be folding into, enveloping, and passing through one another like the movement of amoebic, cellular masses. Macdonald’s introduction to the medium Lucite 44 in 1957, a synthetic resin-based acrylic also used by Jackson Pollock, gave him the ability to capture the texture and movement of the brave new microcosmic universe on his canvases. His biomorphic forms take shape as churning, cytoplasmic membranes as though viewed through a microscope, moving in accordance with the invisible laws of the natural world. While Nakamura's paintings allude to a systemic, underlying natural order of rhythmic patterns and webbed networks, Macdonald's configurations suggest an elemental metamorphosis of states of being. Neither solid, liquid, or gas, the properties of Macdonald's forms are more akin to the intangible and primordial forces of heat and fluidity, growth and propagation. For both artists, however, scrutiny into the atomic and cellular components

⁴⁹³ Quoted in Thom, “The Early Work: An Artist Emerges,” 15.

of nature revealed the hidden forces of the infinite, expansive universe. As Ian Thom and Joyce Zemans have both observed, Macdonald's quest for a "new space dynamic" led him into the "space of the twentieth century, the space of Einstein and Minkowsky, a space that was not limited by three-dimensional illusionistic handling, but that instead reflected the simultaneity of events, a space that incorporated time."⁴⁹⁴

Space was a concept that many Painters Eleven members found useful for explaining abstract painting because it bridged the artistic innovations of modern art with the discoveries of a technologically transformed postwar society. Its ability to transcend figuration and physical matter made it an ideal theoretical tool for the group, who wielded it in their battle against Toronto's conservative landscape painting and provincialist attitudes, hoping to elevate national outlooks into a new spatial awareness. Painters Eleven thus constructed and mobilized "space" as a strategy of communication, asserting abstraction's ability to visually transmit the intangible properties of nature and interrogating what abstraction means in the context of Canadian cultural production in the 1950s. Hortense Gordon's preoccupation with using "push and pull" to "rise above the material," Alexandra Luke's understanding of "the artist's own intuition...of the infinite

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., and Zemans, *The Inner Landscape*, 228. Zemans also argues that Macdonald's attention is divided between the ideas of Mondrian and Hans Hofmann, evident in the way that the principles of "push-pull" and grid-like organization of the surface tend to produce more grid-like, geometric and linearly-oriented imagery, and the ideas of Moholy-Nagy and the Automatistes, from whose teachings he developed the desire to explore the organic forms and forces of nature and the subconscious, and through which his canvases have achieved the evocation of natural forces and the unknown cosmos and the universe's hidden spirituality.

which [man] carries within himself,” Kazuo Nakamura’s belief in the “fundamental universal pattern in all art and nature,” and Jock Macdonald's assertion that “the abstract artist is expressing his inner vision” of “a new form of consciousness,” are all articulations of a postwar understanding of the transcendental and harmonic relationship between “the infinitesimal and the expansive” which connects all of nature and the universe through the medium of space.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Painters Eleven officially disbanded in 1960, believing they had accomplished their goal of validating abstract painting in Canada. Their decision to part ways followed a trio of high-profile exhibitions at the Montreal École des Beaux Arts in 1958, the National Gallery of Canada in 1959, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1960. Institutional acceptance had been achieved. Between 1957 and 1960, Painters Eleven were regularly invited to exhibit as a group by local and out-of-province galleries, and many individual members were also featured in solo shows throughout Toronto. A handful—most notably Jack Bush and Harold Town—were also gaining both national and international reputations as solo artists. This string of successes fulfilled the prophecy that Painters Eleven had made five years earlier in their anti-manifesto of 1955, where they declared: “there is no jury but time.”

Art societies were also dying. The Massey Report and the creation of the Canada Council for the Arts rang the first “kiss of death”⁴⁹⁵ for major art societies like the Ontario Society of Artists and the Royal Canadian Academy, which had dominated the system of artistic production and exhibition since the late-nineteenth-century. Although they did not become extinct, the art societies’ influence in Toronto declined dramatically over the decade of the 1950s. This is also due in part to the rapid development of commercial art galleries in the fast-growing metropolis, which offered new opportunities for artists to exhibit their artwork outside of the society institutions. Painters Eleven had already benefited from this shift in exhibition practices. The T. Eaton Fine Art Gallery

⁴⁹⁵ Correspondence Jock Macdonald to Maxwell Bates, cited in Robert McKaskell, 32.

had pioneered all-abstract exhibitions in the late 1940s, and the Roberts Gallery gave Painters Eleven their first two shows in 1954 and 1955, a few years after shifting away from a European art focus and toward a Canadian art focus. Other influential commercial galleries that opened in the 1950s include the Laing Galleries, the Upstairs Gallery (later the Mazelow Gallery), the Greenwich Gallery, the Gallery of Contemporary Art, and, in the 1960s, the Jerrold Morris International Gallery. During this period, new dealers were willing to show young and experimental artists, and many hosted solo exhibitions of Painters Eleven members Kazuo Nakamura, Harold Town, Tom Hodgson, and Walter Yarwood. By the late 1950s, Toronto was no longer bound to the conservative influences of art societies. With these two major shifts in the cultural environment, Painters Eleven were cemented into the art historical narrative in Canada—and in particular into accounts of the mid-century “crisis of abstraction”—as the group that cleared the way for abstract painting in Canada.

Vindication, however, came at a cost. Painters Eleven had built their identity, ambition, and ideological cohesion—their founding principle of “harmonious disagreement”—on the avant-garde spirit of antagonism and a *being-in-common* social unity against the enemy of artistic conservatism. This ideology was contingent upon Painters Eleven’s condition of relationality against Toronto’s oppressive art societies and their juried exhibitions. Once abstract painting and Painters Eleven were accepted and folded into Canada’s newly developed transnational cultural model of cosmopolitan artistic production, the system of relationality between avant-garde collectivity and common enemy dissolved, establishing Painters Eleven as the new status quo. In other words, institutional validation left Painters Eleven without an ideology or purpose. It is

small wonder that, in contrast to the flurry of energy, drive, and noisy conviction that characterized the group's first few years of activity, the end of their story fizzles out without climax. As evident in their published material and correspondence, Painters Eleven were most exhilarated when they anticipated conflict and tension, or even when they experienced wrongful discrimination or ridicule, because it affirmed their status as the alienated avant-garde. While their group activities were sapped of their original thrill and "trail-blazing" energy, many of their solo pursuits flourished, leading to a further dispersal of their already tenuous cohesion.

Thus even in their dissolution Painters Eleven grappled with another contradiction—to achieve their goal, they had required institutional recognition, but achieving recognition paradoxically voided the necessity of their grouping. This made the very existence of Painters Eleven redundant. Such an end seems fitting for a collective whose ideological parameters were framed, from their inception, as an attempt to negotiate, mediate, and overcome contradiction and conflict by way of "harmony." Crucially, it is their enterprise of self-conceptualization and self-promotion—undertaken to manufacture a façade of unity and cohesion—that characterizes "harmony" as the underlying framework of Painters Eleven's unique set of modernist discourses and strategies. The group was after all a practical "mechanism"⁴⁹⁶ that was formed primarily out of circumstantial opportunity. Painters Eleven chiefly operated as an economical and functional means by which to exhibit abstract painting outside of the prevailing arts

⁴⁹⁶ Harold Town, "Rough drafts of P11 beginnings," n.d., unpublished essay, MG30 D404, Volume 32, File 4, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

societies system. As an independent collective, the effectiveness of their crusade relied upon a compelling marketing and publicity campaign through which they would establish the avant-garde solidarity of their group image.⁴⁹⁷ Painters Eleven's push for a cohesive or "harmonious" identity is thus rooted in the necessity to self-fashion themselves into a recognizable unit or brand, regardless of their internal social, personal, and aesthetic heterogeneities. The overall idea of "harmony" facilitated the production of just such an identity because it enabled them to sew together a mythological position for themselves as "pioneers of modernism" in the narrative of Canadian art history.

As a subject of art historical inquiry, the significance of Painters Eleven as producers of a postwar Canadian artistic modernism may be best understood and framed as the execution of a series of discursive and practical strategies, each of which aimed at self-marketing and at constructing meaning for their own work within the context of the nation's midcentury art and cultural politics. These strategies operated in tandem under the umbrella ideology of "harmony" as it overlaps with the transnational cultural outlook—the prioritization of the 'high' cultural refinement of the members of a nation in order to achieve an international standard of cultural taste and intellect⁴⁹⁸—in its promise to mediate conflicting concepts through a universalizing cosmopolitanism. Discursively, one of Painters Eleven's primary undertakings was to produce a set of modernist philosophies through which their abstract paintings could be understood to have meaning, and through which they could simultaneously carve out an avant-garde position for

⁴⁹⁷ Peter Croyden, Photograph of Painters Eleven taken for the 1958 exhibition *Painters XI* at the Park Gallery, 1957.

⁴⁹⁸ Jenkins, "National Cultural Policy and the International Liberal Order," 120.

themselves. To achieve this Painters Eleven drew from a number of established theories and concepts, including those set forth by Hans Hofmann, Herbert Read, and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, which legitimized abstraction by asserting the autonomy of the pictorial field, the primacy of the visual encounter, the emotional coherence of non-figurative composition, and the transcendent nature of the intuitive image-making process. Painters Eleven inserted these discourses into the existing debates over “modernistic” and “non-objective” painting that circulated in Toronto’s newspaper and print media throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. Out of this public dialogue, where they also wove together a narrative of marginalization and persecution, their association with the “crisis of abstraction” effectively established Painters Eleven as one of the key instigators of modernism in Toronto.

In their avant-garde rhetoric Painters Eleven articulated the transnational cultural outlook’s core idea of cultural elevation, producing meaning for their work by framing abstraction as a way to universalize Canada’s postwar artistic identity and to elevate it above the figurative, the regional, and the geographic. In other words, Painters Eleven attempted to “harmonize” abstract painting and its aesthetic philosophies with the shifting interests of the nation and the rapidly transforming scientific and technological conditions of the world. As such the dialectic of “space” was woven into their discourse as a transcendent consciousness of the metaphysical truths of the universe, revealed to humanity through the technological achievement of new microscopic and macroscopic knowledges and then transmitted from the intuitive artist to the spectator through abstraction. Painters Eleven thus inscribed their practice with the task of cultural elevation, believing that their art could awaken its viewers to a cosmopolitan outlook and

bridge the gap between national, international and even universal interests. Educating the layman on the appreciation of modern art was also key to this task, as Painters Eleven attempted to redefine the parameters of “cultural competence” in Toronto in the 1950s by discursively shift the scheme of perception so that abstract painting becomes “legitimate” to the layman.⁴⁹⁹ In doing so, they hoped to disarticulate the existing cultural code in English Canada which valued figurative and landscape painting, turning it into a realm of *incompetence*. This strategy was a discursive intervention into Canada’s cultural politics.

Painters Eleven’s main practical strategy involved local and international exhibition and recognition. The goal of this tactic was simple—to validate or enact their discursive claims by demonstrating how their artwork is up-to-date with aesthetic advancements beyond Canada. Their participation in the American Abstract Artists’ annual exhibition at the Riverside Museum in New York City in 1956 reached this goal, as it vindicated their cause and also meant that their self-promotional strategy of “harmony” was a success. At the Riverside Museum, Painters Eleven were able to facilitate a dialogue between their overlapping modernist formal concerns by verifying their compatibility with a range of American practices and art-critical modernisms. By placing their work side by side with American abstraction, they could market themselves as leaders of modernism in Canada. The successful implementation of this strategy in New York served in part to affirm their discursive avant-garde self-fashioning, where Painters Eleven inaugurated the idea of “harmony” to obscure their contradictory and antagonistic nature.

⁴⁹⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

Beginning with their anti-manifestos of 1954 and 1955, which claimed that Toronto's conservative art milieu was "repressing" their "freedom" to produce and exhibit their abstract paintings, their public statements drew heavily upon the morally superior approach of "harmonious disagreement" in their patronizing tone. They often petitioned for amicability, open-mindedness, and civil dialogue against their enemies' media campaign of "childish smears" and insults, while privately adopting the same mean-spiritedness that they denounced others for—Jock Macdonald was particularly vindictive, commenting on the "nasty," "frothing," and "poisonous" "poor prunes"—and indeed many of them seemed to relish the anti-modern hostility against them, interpreting and rationalizing it as evidence of their avant-garde alienation. This attitude is carried through into 1958, when they maintained their innocence and high moral standing by claiming that they have "condemned no one, no school, no opinion."⁵⁰⁰

This underlying conflict of identity, where "harmony" breaks down and is revealed to be an ideology as such, is exposed in the failed attempt to organize an exhibition in Paris in 1956. Notably, the rupture between discourse and practice in this case has little to do with the international relations between Painters Eleven and Parisian organizers, but rather is centered around the frictions perceived between Painters Eleven and Canada's own cultural authorities. Close study of the correspondence between Painters Eleven and Paris suggests that the French organizers, Michel Tapié and René Garneau, most likely lost enthusiasm for the show. That Painters Eleven suspected sabotage unveils the antagonism beneath the group's "harmonious" façade. Despite their

⁵⁰⁰ William Heine, "Points of View Make a Lively Show," *Weekend Magazine* 8:45 (1958): 16–18.

parallel cosmopolitan values and common transnational cultural goal—the mobilization of modern art towards national cultural elevation in the context of an international world order—Painters Eleven were unwilling to cooperate with English-Canadian cultural institutions or official channels. Although “harmonious” in terms of discourse, Painters Eleven were in practical conflict with national institutions and state interests.

Painters Eleven’s artistic modernism is defined by a constellation of discursive, theoretical, and practical strategies driven by the ideology of harmony. Rather than force a coherent narrative upon the group, this dissertation has sought instead to probe the entangled ways that “harmony” framed their activities, articulations, statements, attitudes, outlooks and beliefs. As an inquiry into a particular moment of postwar Canadian modernism, this project has examined how modern art and its driving philosophical convictions were received, understood, and re-articulated within the historically specific context of midcentury English Canada. In particular, Painters Eleven attempted to negotiate and reconcile the international, universalizing convictions of modernism and abstraction with the increasingly urgent concern for national identity and local practice in Canada. By embedding themselves in the already existing discourse of Canadian nationalism and internationalism, Painters Eleven secured for themselves a place in the canon of Canadian art history.

Figures

Figure 1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Alexandra Luke, *The Cloister*, 1953, oil on canvas, Private Collection.



Figure 2: Oscar Cahén, *Candy Tree*, 1952, oil on masonite, Collection of The Cahén Archives. Permission courtesy the Estate of Oscar Cahén.

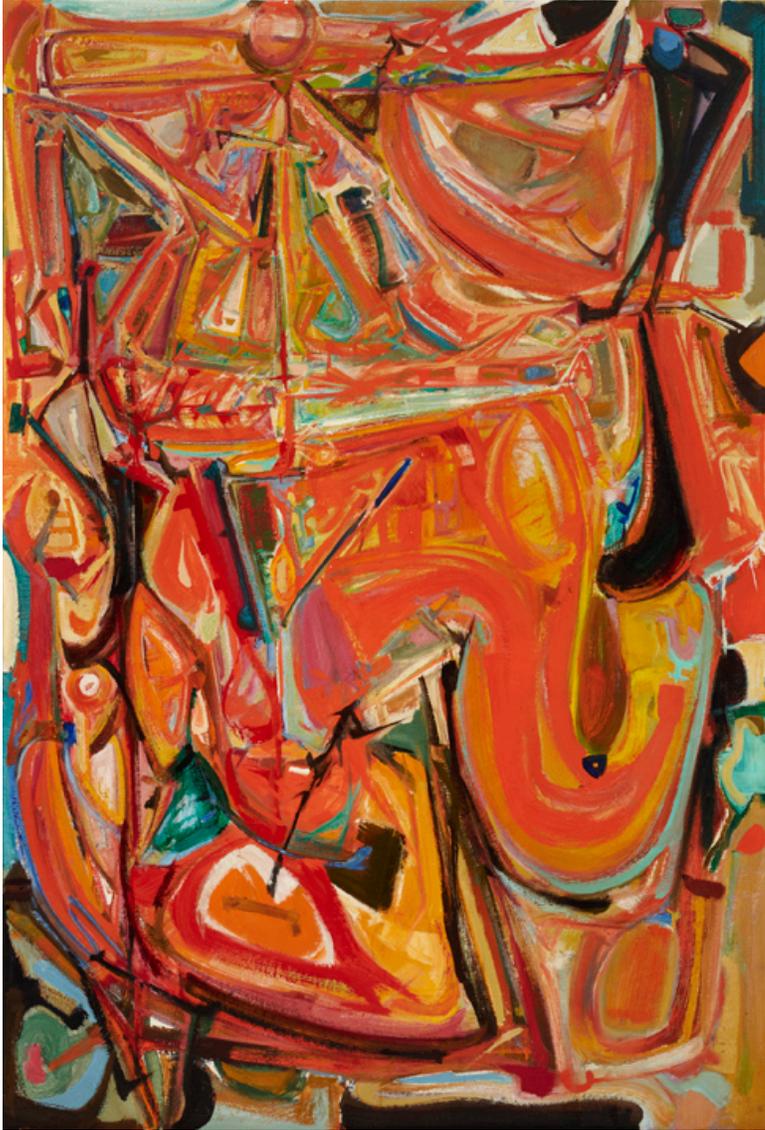


Figure 3: Harold Town, *Tumult for a King*, 1954, oil and Lucite on canvas. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Harold Town.



Figure 5: Oscar Cahén, *Rooster*, 1951, oil, location unknown, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Oscar Cahén.

Figure 6 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jack Bush, *Release*, 1949, medium and location unavailable, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

Figure 7 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Harold Town, *The Politician*, 1949, medium and location unavailable, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

Figure 8 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Stanley Cooper, *Intersection*, c.1951, medium and location unavailable, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

Figure 9 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Alexandra Luke, *Interior with Relics*, 1950, oil on canvas, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 10 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jock Macdonald, *Still Life with Yellow Bird*, 1951, oil on canvas, Collection of Mr. M. Sharf, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

Figure 11 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Fred H. Brigden, *Bay St. Lawrence*, c. 1951, oil on canvas, location unavailable, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

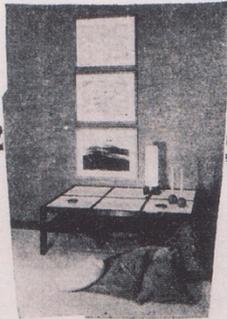
Figure 12 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. A.Y. Jackson, *October, Twin Butte, Alberta*, 1951, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada, reproduction from the Ontario Society of Artists 1951 Exhibition Catalogue, F1140-5, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, Archives of Ontario, North York, Canada.

Figure 13 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Oscar Cahén, *Still Life*, 1950, pastel on illustration board, Collection of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Figure 14 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Exhibition Pamphlet, Painters 11 at the Roberts Gallery, 1955, Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Figure 15 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Exhibition pamphlet, *YWCA Canadian Abstract Exhibition*, 1952, organized by Alexandra Luke, Collection of The Oscar Cahén Archives.

STORE HOURS: 9:00 TO 5:30, SIX DAYS A WEEK — TELEPHONE ORDER SERVICE OPEN 8:30 TO 5:30 — TRINITY 8111



"Summer Reflection", "Plowed Fields" and "Morning Landscape", by Kazuo Nakamura, are at home with a low, wide coffee table, green wallpaper, Formica and mahogany topped table, with two cushions, \$29.50
Curtain lamp, each \$2.50
"Summer Reflection", \$40;
"Plowed Fields", \$60; "Morning Landscape", \$50; "Distant Valleys" (not in picture), \$55

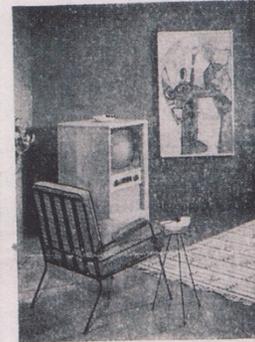
"Close Up", by Tom Hodgson, is at home with traditional furniture
Sofa and two chairs, mustard tone with gold metallic thread, three pieces, \$68.50
Nest of three tables, hooded leather tops, \$95
Mahogany coffee table, \$9.50
Nest of tables, curved fronts, set of three, \$105
Grey and off-white glass lamps, each \$50
"Close Up", \$190



"Before the Snow", by William Ronald, is at home with timeless beauty of marble-top topped buffet
Buffet, painted, three compartments, \$995
Underbar table, with three leaves, \$318
Arm chair, each \$119
Black wire candle sconce, each \$14.50
"Before the Snow", \$300



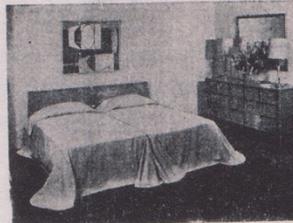
Lamps from Simpson's Sixth Floor, Dept. 479
Iron chair and sofa table, bar stool and dresser from Simpson's Fifth Floor, Dept. 401
Other furniture from Simpson's Fifth Floor, Dept. 402
Ash tray stand from Simpson's Sixth Floor, Dept. 415
Rugs from Simpson's Fourth Floor, Dept. 378
Candle sconce from Simpson's Sixth Floor, Dept. 444
Television from Simpson's Sixth Floor, Dept. 455



"Candy Tree", by Oscar Cahen, is at home with television and wrought iron
Simpson's Suretone Television console, 21-inch screen, iron oak, 23 or 40 cycles, \$59.95
Swedish modern rug, 5 feet 7 inches x 7 feet 10 inches, \$25.50
Wrought iron chair, featured in green over cream, \$4.50
Wire ash tray, two pieces, 4.95
"Candy Tree", \$450



"Painting, 1953", by Jack Bush, at home with "Respective" by Dorel
Four-drawer chest, \$27.50
Bar bed, \$39.50
Twin-head gooseneck lamps, each \$6.95
Loops-Twist cotton rug, 36 by 63 inches, each \$0.95
"Painting, 1953", \$300



"Turn About", by Ray Mead, is at home with Cross Country from the Grand Rapids Furniture Makers Guild
Triple dresser, faux mahogany, \$340
Mirror to match, \$9.50
Faux mahogany twin beds, each \$9.50
Lamps, brass with wood, each \$6.95
"Turn About", \$129

Abstracts at home

A painting can perfect a room, confer on the furnishings a greater effectiveness, provide a focal point for the home. In a series of seven room settings on Simpson's Fifth Floor, the work of leading Canadian artists has been used to complement contemporary room settings. Here abstract and non-objective art is equally at home with traditional or 20th Century furnishings.

Simpson's Home Furnishing Floors, 4, 5 and 6



"Golden Glory", by Alexandra Lake, is at home with French Provincial
Powder table, antique white with gold, 11.5, import, \$65
Director's chair, gold, green fabric, each, \$35
Sheepskin rug, white, each, \$5.50
"Golden Glory", \$403
"Yellow and Black" (wall water color), \$55

Simpson's

Additional paintings on display in Queen Street Window Box, 23
"Square Pattern", by Jack Bush, \$125
"Bird and Flower", by Oscar Cahen, \$50
"Blue Lamp", by Tom Hodgson, \$95
"Innovation", by Alexandra Lake, \$65
"Stone Dialectic", by Ray Mead, \$100
"Green Sky", by Kazuo Nakamura, \$55
"Chalet", by William Ronald, \$110
Paintings may be purchased through Simpson's Sixth Floor, Dept. 454

Figure 16: Abstracts at Home Advertisement, *The Globe and Mail*, October 19, 1953, Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Figure 17 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Publicity photograph for the Abstracts at Home exhibition, October 1953.

Figure 18 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Nina Leen, photograph taken for *Life* magazine, "Irascible Group of Advanced Artists Led Fight Against Show," *Life*, January 15, 1951.

Figure 19 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Bob Cowans, photograph of the opening of the 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists, New York, 1956. From left to right: Jock Macdonald, M.B. Kesserling (vice consul, Canadian consulate), Nettie S. Horch (director, Riverside Museum, New York), Alexandra Luke, Jack Bush, Helen Ronald, and William Ronald.



Figure 20: Tom Hodgson, *It Became Green*, 1956, oil on canvas, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 21 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jock Macdonald, *White Bark*, 1954, oil on masonite, Private Collection.

Figure 22 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Exhibition Pamphlet, 20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists with “Painters Eleven” of Canada, New York, 1956, Riverside Museum, Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Figure 23 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Kazuo Nakamura, *White Landscape*, 1953, medium and location unavailable.

Figure 24 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. William Ronald, *Drumbeat*, 1956, oil on canvas, Collection of Vanac Development Corp.



Figure 25: William Ronald, *Central Black*, 1956, oil on canvas, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. Permission courtesy of the Estate of William Ronald.

Figure 26 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Perle Fine, *Thundering Rhythms*, c.1956, medium and location unavailable.

Figure 27 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. George L. K. Morris, *Space Recession*, 1954, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

Figure 28 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Ilya Bolotowsky, *Grey Diamond*, 1955, oil on canvas mounted on panel, Art Institute of Chicago and Estate of Ilya Bolotowsky.



Figure 29: Tom Hodgson, *Yellow Hydrant*, 1953, oil, sand, and acrylic on masonite, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 30 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Graham Sutherland, *Thorn Tree*, 1945, oil on canvas, Collection of British Council Visual Arts.

Figure 31 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jackson Pollock, *Cathedral*, 1947, enamel and aluminum paint on canvas, Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art.



Figure 32: Hortense Gordon, *Orange and Yellows Bound in Space*, 1952, oil and graphite on canvas, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 33 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Hortense Gordon, *Figure in Solution*, 1956, oil and graphite on canvas board, Collection of Barb and Jens Thielsen.

Figure 34 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Hortense Gordon, *Time Bound in Space*, 1957, oil on canvas, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 35 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jock Macdonald, *Nature's Pattern*, 1954, gouache, ink on paper, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Figure 36 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Kazuo Nakamura, *Inner View*, 1954, oil on masonite, Collection of the artist.

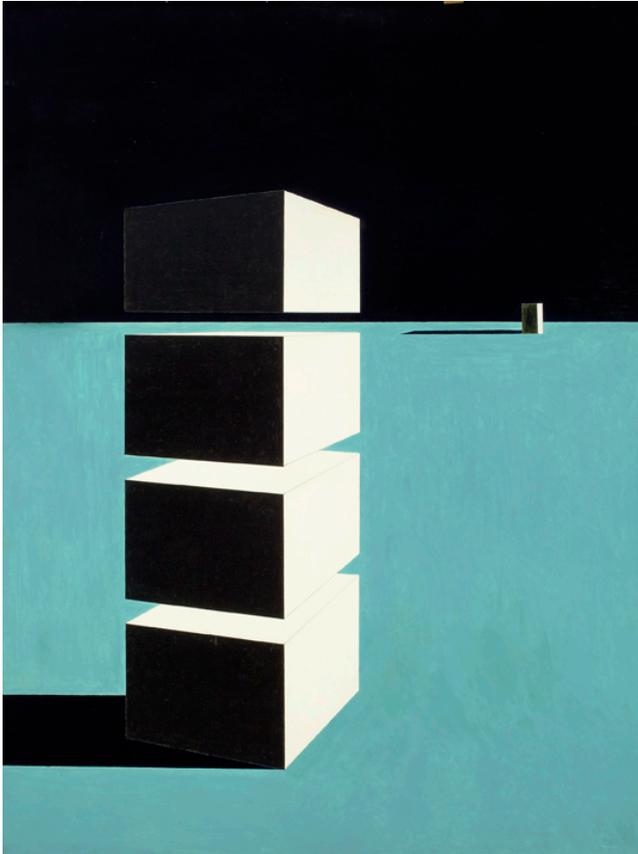


Figure 37: Kazuo Nakamura, *Suspension*, 1956, oil and graphite on masonite, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Kazuo Nakamura.

Figure 38 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Photograph of Kazuo Nakamura with the June 1957 issue of *Scientific American*, Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

Figure 39 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Cover of *Scientific American*, June 1957.

Figure 40 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. United States Atomic Energy Commission logo, featuring the Rutherford-Bohr Model of the atom, 1946–1975.

Figure 41 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Page from Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 1947.

Figure 42 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Detail of Figure 39, electron micrograph of one grain of face powder enlarged 25,000 times, from László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 1947.

Figure 43 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Jock Macdonald, *Nature Evolving*, 1960, oil, Lucite 44 on canvas, Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

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