

GORDON SMITH: A STUDY OF THE ARTIST'S LIFE

AND CAREER FROM 1919 TO 1955

by

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ABSTRACT

To date, no study in depth of the artist, Gordon Smith (1919 -), or of his time in Vancouver (since 1944) has been undertaken. This thesis chronicles his life, career and work, from his boyhood in England in the 1920's and early 1930's up to the time in 1955 when he achieved national attention at the First Biennial of Canadian Painting, Ottawa. Chapter 1 deals with the period 1919 - 1939, first in England and after 1934 in Winnipeg. Chapter 2 covers the war years, 1939 - 1944. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with the successive phases in Smith's development as an artist in Vancouver, 1944 - 1946, 1946 - 1951, and 1951 - 1955 respectively. The period, 1944 - 1955, covered by the last three chapters (3 - 5) saw firstly, the maturation of Smith's development as a painter. A secondary theme of this thesis, outlined in these last three chapters is the history of the development of the visual arts in Vancouver and the cultural climate in which Smith was working, both as an artist and a teacher.

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Collection: The National Gallery of Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

Gordon Smith first came to national attention in May 1955, when, at the First Biennial of Canadian Painting, held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, he was awarded the first prize for his painting Structure With Red Sun. Prior to this award, Smith had lived since 1944 in Vancouver, where he took part, both as an artist and as a teacher, in the rapid artistic development of the city. By 1955, he was an integral member of a group of artists in Vancouver whose work had attracted critical attention in Canada, to the extent that one writer had claimed: "(Vancouver) is a new centre for the arts."¹

Born in England in 1919, Smith, as a young boy, developed an interest in art, which was fostered by his father. This consisted of painting small water colour landscapes, and visits to the Tate and National Galleries. In 1934, Smith moved to Canada with his mother and elder brother, settling in Winnipeg. Here, Smith's opportunities to further his interest in art were initially curbed by the family's financial situation, as well as the absence of significant art in that city. In 1937, however, Smith again became actively involved with art: as a student at the Winnipeg School of Art which was headed by Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald; as a part-time employee of the commercial art firm of Brigden's of Winnipeg; and as a teacher of Saturday morning Children's Art Classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

For Smith, the education received at the Winnipeg School of Art, as well as the practical experience gained at Brigden's, reinforced the tradition of nineteenth century English water colour painting with

which he was familiar. His experiences in art at this time, in the late 1930's, were circumscribed by the intellectual limitations of Winnipeg, which were the result of the city's relative geographical isolation from any other major urban centre. The artists in Winnipeg looked to England for their artistic exemplars, and so did Smith.

The outbreak of the Second World War, gave Smith the opportunity to leave Winnipeg. He went overseas as a reinforcement officer for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Corps in July 1942. For a few months in 1942 - 1943 he worked closely with Will Ogilvie, the war artist posted to his regiment. Under Ogilvie's influence, he started experimenting in his use of the water colour medium. As well, he was able, while in London, to expand the boundaries of his artistic education, visiting the galleries and seeing exhibitions of the British War Artists. From 1942, his work entered a period of change and development, which would culminate in the mid 1950's.

Wounded during the Sicilian Campaign, in July 1943, Smith returned to Canada in 1944, joining his wife, Marion, in Vancouver on January 10 of that year. During the war and the time spent recuperating from his wounds, Smith gave much thought to his future career. During 1944, in Vancouver, these thoughts crystallized. He decided to pursue a career as an artist while supporting himself by becoming an art teacher. Subsequently, he spent 1945 and half of 1946 obtaining the necessary academic qualifications required of an art teacher and, thus qualified, he joined the staff of the Vancouver School of Art.

1946 marked a turning point for Smith's art. Enjoying the financial security of the job at the Vancouver School of Art, he was able to devote himself fully to considering the problems which had emerged as basic to his painting. These were his concern for the 'space of the canvas'; his awareness of the material qualities of paint and the exploitation of them for their own sakes; and the development of a style of painting in which the use of a subject became the starting point for an exercise in the act of painting rather than an exercise in the act of image making.

1946 marked, for Vancouver, the beginning of an influx of new talents, ideas and energies which would result in the rapid growth of Vancouver's cultural life. Enrollment at the Vancouver School of Art increased sevenfold in the years 1946 - 1948. The Vancouver Art Gallery tripled its exhibition space in 1951. A Community Arts Council was formed in the late 1940's which promoted a series of concerts and art related activities in the following years. The energy sustaining these activities was generated by a relatively small group of people who managed to establish a solid base upon which future growth in the arts was to develop. Of primary importance during this period were the artists, who reacted to these events and who developed their own style of work. Smith was one of these artists.

The development of Smith's art, in the period 1944 - 1955 can be characterised by the coming together of two basic stylistic elements: first, the influence of British painting, reflecting his early experiences as a child as well as the more recent exhibitions of contemporary British

art held at The Vancouver Art Gallery and, second, contemporary American art, of which Smith became acutely aware as a result of his few months study in San Francisco in 1950, which allowed him to loosen up his own work and to develop a more gestural manner of painting. The result was a style of painting in which the freedom of paint handling, as exemplified by the American Abstract Expressionists, was joined with a concern for imagery, closely related to the work of British painters such as Graham Sutherland. Structure With Red Sun, which brought Smith into national prominence in 1955, was a developed example of this new personal style which combined both the American and English influences.

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine Smith's artistic career from its beginning, and the situation in Vancouver after 1944, in order to outline those characteristics of his work which led to Smith's recognition as an artist of national stature, in 1955.

1 H.R. Hubbard, "A Climate for the Arts," Canadian Art XII (Spring, 1955), p. 139.

CHAPTER 1

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE 1919 - 1939

Gordon Appelbe Smith (b. June 18, 1919) was born at Hove, Sussex, where his mother, née Daisy Appelbe (1883 -) was visiting relatives while awaiting his birth.¹ His father, William George Smith (1880 - ?) was absent at the time, on military duty on the Isle of Wight. Shortly after Gordon's birth Mrs. Smith, her elder son Donald, two years of age, and the new baby returned home to 111 Marylebone High Street, London, where they were soon joined by Gordon's father.²

William George Smith was a grocer employed by the Chapman Grocery chain. His was a modest job which provided for the basics of life only. To augment the family income Mrs. Smith took in borders, a recurring event in the family's life. This domestic arrangement ended temporarily when, in 1925, Smith's father left his job with Chapman's to work on his own. He moved the family to Rotherhithe, a docks area on the south side of the Thames River. Here, using a hand cart he delivered milk in the area. Occasionally, Donald and Gordon would accompany their father on his rounds. The area was poor and the milk run was not successful; the year of 1925 - 26 was one of extreme financial hardship for the Smiths. Mrs. Smith again took in borders, an arrangement which necessitated the boys' sleeping in the hall of the house.

In 1926, the family's circumstances improved, both financially and geographically. Smith's father opened his own grocery store, 'W.G. Smith', located on Edgware Road, north of Hyde Park. The family moved out of the city, to a house at 116 Drury Road, West Harrow, approximately twenty miles south of London. From here, Smith's father commuted to the city putting in long days: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 10:30 p.m. Saturday, and 9:00 a.m. - noon on Sundays. The distance

commuted each day and the long hours worked were compensated for by his deep attachment to the countryside.

In 1926, West Harrow was still pastoral countryside; at Drury Road, cows came up to the back fence. Close by was a farm which the boys would visit and, on occasion, camp out. Also close by were the South Downs where Smith's father would often take the boys on long excursions, noting the wild life to be found there. Sometimes, on Sunday afternoons, he would take them to the Museum of Natural History in London.

Smith's father expressed his love of the countryside in another way - water colour painting. Although without formal art training, he was an accomplished water colourist, who, later in the 1930's, also worked with oils. His works, some of which are in Gordon Smith's possession, reveal a basic awareness of the countryside, an awareness no doubt cultivated as a release from the pressures of business life in the city. These water colours are small works, averaging 4" x 8" in dimension. The subject matter was usually the landscape, with occasional seaside views, reflecting holiday visits.

William Smith encouraged his children to try their hand at water colour painting, giving them each a new set of Windsor & Newton water colours as Christmas presents. Not only did he give the boys the materials to work with, he also encouraged them to mount their works in glass, taped with passepartout, and to hold small exhibitions of their work at home.³

In encouraging the boys to work with water colour, Smith's father often took them on their Sunday excursions to London, to The Tate or the National Galleries. There he would usually gravitate to the works

of the English landscape painters such as J.M.W. Turner, John Constable, and Samuel Palmer, while not ignoring the Pre-Raphaelites or late nineteenth century painters. His appreciation of these paintings was that of an amateur. He did not theorize about the works which he took the boys to see.

In fostering an awareness of art, and particularly landscape painting, Smith's father would sometimes discuss the technical aspects of what they were seeing, noting, for example, the qualities of the paper and how it could be used. At home, there were copies of art magazines such as The Studio, as well as various art books, of which Smith recalls one on Botticelli.⁴ This interest in and activity with art, begun at home, stayed with him while at boarding school and on vacations.

In 1930, Smith won a scholarship to attend the Harrow County School, Middlesex.⁵ Of this opportunity, Smith noted: "It changed my life. It was a marvellous, excellent school which gave me the basics of a very fine education. Attending this school opened up all sorts of possibilities for my future. It changed my accent - when I met my father again during the Second World War, I was surprised that he had a Cockney accent. I was extremely happy at the school. I was captain of the cricket team and later won my colours on the Under Fifteen rugby team."⁶

In addition to such basic courses as Mathematics, English, and Latin, there were also art classes given by an accomplished teacher, George Neale. Under Neale, Smith studied drawing, still life, and water colour painting, winning prizes for his work at the annual Speech Day ceremonies.

The four happy years at Harrow County School, 1930 - 1934, ended abruptly when Smith's parents separated. Things had gone badly for Smith's father and mother. In a few months, his parents had separated, and Smith's father, more of an artist than a business man went bankrupt.

In the summer of 1934, William Smith remained in London where he tried to make a living selling his water colours door to door, for 6d. each.⁷ Daisy Smith took the boys with her to Winnipeg, joining members of her family, who had emigrated to Canada before the First World War. The shock of being uprooted from a sophisticated school and of being transplanted to the Winnipeg of the 1930's was considerable. A difficult financial situation ensued. Arriving at Winnipeg, the Smiths moved into a basement apartment in a block owned by one of Mrs. Smith's brothers-in-law. For this apartment they provided janitorial services in lieu of rent.

After six months, Mrs. Smith rented a house and once more took in boarders. Then followed a period of moves every six months, with Daisy Smith, the boys, and some of the boarders moving into different houses. Amidst this, Smith held down two paper routes, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. For this, he eventually received a gold pocket watch from the Winnipeg Free Press testifying to his services for the paper.⁸

This period of change and uncertainty affected Smith's education. In the spring of 1937, prior to matriculating, he dropped out of the Gordon Bell High School. In the following September Smith enrolled in the Winnipeg School of Art. This was not a matter of wanting to become an artist, but rather one of obtaining a skill.

"During the depression I only thought of survival, of getting some sort of a job. Art was something I had had presented to me in an attractive way by my father; I seemed to have some talent in that line; and without actually formulating any very precise or clear cut ambition, I was working towards a job in some field connected with art: commercial perhaps, or in teaching."⁹

In 1937, when Smith enrolled in Winnipeg School of Art (WSA), it had been in operation for twenty-five years, having been founded in 1912.¹⁰ In the latter 1920's and during the Depression years of the 1930's the economic fortunes of the WSA had not been good. The principal of the WSA in 1937 was Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, who had held that position since 1929.¹¹ Assisting FitzGerald were two adept water colour painters, Willis Wheatley and George Overton, both of whom had been trained in England in the manner favoured by the Royal Water Colour Society.¹²

Of these three teachers, FitzGerald had the most influence on Smith, though his influence was not so much a matter of the didactic transmission of a specific style but rather the communication of a general approach to drawing and water colour painting which was careful, tight, and controlled. Overton and Wheatley taught classes in landscape water colour painting, the current preoccupation for the majority of artists in Winnipeg at that time.¹³

FitzGerald's approach to art, although not verbalized in his classes, was apparent to his students who were expected to work after his method. The basis of these classes was the study and practice of finely detailed and analytical drawings, which finally led to the use of oil on canvas. These drawing classes were held on a weekly basis. At the beginning, FitzGerald set the subject matter, either still life or from the model. This done, he would leave the students, returning occasionally to inspect their work and to make corrections. In these classes, the initial emphasis was on the outline of the subject, after which the modelling

followed:

"You went over the subject as if you were a fly crawling across the surface, exploring and recording every aspect of that surface." 14

For the next few years, this approach to drawing was to be a fundamental part of Smith's craft. This approach had both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, Smith received a rigorous and basic training in the art of drawing. On the negative side, this approach to drawing was so controlled and structured that it would take him some time to break away from it.¹⁵

Although a great influence on his students, FitzGerald neither propounded a theory of art nor discussed with them what he was trying to accomplish in his own water colours and paintings.¹⁶ Personable and approachable at the school, FitzGerald tended to keep his painting and teaching activities separate, so while Smith often talked to FitzGerald and was, in fact, on good terms with him, FitzGerald's own studio and thoughts on his art remained private.¹⁷

In retrospect, one of the main aspects of FitzGerald's teaching which was to remain of importance to Smith, was FitzGerald's concern for the well-made object and its proper expression by the artist; that is, the proper use of materials and the careful building up of the image. An examination of FitzGerald's paintings and drawings, as well as his previously unpublished notes reveals this emphasis as a major concern of his, and one which illuminates the training he gave to the students at the WSA:

"It is necessary to get inside the object and to push it out rather than building it up from the outer aspect . . . this requires endless search and contemplation;

continuous effort and experimentation; and appreciation for the endlessness of the living force which seems to pervade and flow through all natural forms, even though these seem on the surface to be so ephemeral." 18

This concern for the object and the rendering of it in a precise manner was absorbed by Smith as a belief in the principle of a sound basic discipline in drawing, and by extension, a concern for an emphasis on the importance of the element of craft involved in the making of art.

While FitzGerald's stature as a painter has continued to grow since the thirties, at this time, c. 1937, he was working outside the mainstream of art in Winnipeg.¹⁹ He did not take part in the prevailing artistic activity of the time - the painting of the landscape in and about Winnipeg as noted above.²⁰ Although respected, FitzGerald was not the dominant educative artistic force in Winnipeg.²¹ This position must be accorded not to a person, but rather to a commercial enterprise, Brigden's of Winnipeg.²²

Established in 1914, Brigden's was a commercial art firm which, in the 1920's and 1930's, became a centre for the artists in Winnipeg when there was very little other encouragement for the arts. The firm was run by two brothers, Arnold O. Brigden (1886 - 1972) and Frederick Henry Brigden (1871 - 1956). The former was a great friend of FitzGerald, and an avid collector of old master and eighteenth century prints, as well as of Canadian paintings. The latter was a talented and well-known local painter.²³ At one time or another, most of the leading artists in Winnipeg worked for a period at Brigden's.

As this was a commercial firm, the work done by the artists at Brigden's demanded a straight forward use of water colour in its application to commercial art, with the artists drawing on their training at the

WSA. The most prominent of these artists, and the one who set the standard of excellence was W.J. Phillips (1884 - 1963).²⁴ The task which commanded the main energies of those working at Brigden's was the compilation and printing of the semi-annual mail-order catalogue of the T. Eaton Company, a publication mailed across the country. Rather than using photographic reproductions, the catalogue used all aspects of water colour - airbrush renderings for the illustrations, which necessitated a large staff of artists to complete this slow and painstaking process.²⁵

Certainly, there were advantages to working at Brigden's. Firstly, there was the stimulation of working with other artists. Charles Comfort, (1900 -) Director of The National Gallery of Canada, 1960 - 1965, acknowledged these benefits as, at the time under discussion, Brigden's was almost the only form of visible support available to local artists.²⁶ Secondly, and of prime practical importance, was the fact that the firm was able to offer artists employment joined with an enlightened policy of alternate financial support for them when they were not working with the firm. This alternate support usually took the form of a cash subsidy which would help the artists to tide over slack periods at the firm. Brigden's also helped subsidize the artists by paying for part of their tuition at the WSA, so that they might continue their studies, and hopefully, improve their work.

Usually, it was this latter form of help which was extended to the students working part-time at the firm. Smith, who started working at Brigden's in September, 1937, was one of several students who ended up working part-time at Brigden's and spending the rest of their

time studying at the WSA. At Brigden's Smith worked on the women's fashion section of the Eaton catalogue, doing water colours and airbrushing the background of photographs prior to their being photo-engraved on the presses. For this job he was initially paid \$5.00 per week, eventually earning \$7.00 per week. In this manner, Smith continued to work and to study until the outbreak of the Second World War in September, 1939.

During this two year period of work and study several events occurred which further directed Smith towards a professional career in the arts. The first of these might be considered a boost to his morale. In recognition of Smith's talent and potential, FitzGerald asked him to teach the Saturday morning art classes at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.²⁷ These classes were loosely structured with the children sitting on cushions on the floor and working with water colours and poster paint. They were not expected to work from a set subject matter, but were encouraged to experiment.²⁸ It was, for Smith, a beneficial experience which he enjoyed, and one which set him thinking of a future career in the area of education.²⁹

A second form of encouragement toward a professional career in the arts came from the Manitoba Society of Artists, which invited Smith to exhibit in their group show in 1937.³⁰ In addition to exhibiting with these artists, Smith often joined them on their outdoor sketching trips to the rural outskirts of the city, or to the Lake of The Woods. Stylistically, the work of this group was heavily influenced by the tradition of English landscape painting of the nineteenth century.³¹ These outings served to further reinforce Smith's interest in the arts and to help him develop his talents, at a time when there was little public support for the arts.

A third significant event for Smith's future career occurred in the summer of 1939. Using the summer cash grant from Brigden's (\$50.00), Smith bought a bus ticket to San Francisco, where he visited the Golden Gate International Exposition. Here he saw for the first time major twentieth century paintings from Europe, the United States, as well as a selection of paintings from Canada.³² Exhibited were works by Picasso, Matisse, and the German Expressionists. The Canadian works, selected by Lawren Harris, included paintings by the Group of Seven and by Emily Carr. Of the paintings in this exhibition, Smith particularly remembers Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase.³³ The experience of seeing these works was an awakening for Smith. He realized that there was far more to painting than the water colour landscapes he had been doing up to this point; that there was a great deal to be studied. He perceived the Winnipeg artistic milieu with greater perspective.

Stimulated by his experience in San Francisco, Smith returned to Winnipeg where he found himself restricted both by the artistic environment and by the lack of opportunities available. Brigden's appeared a dead end.³⁴

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 1

- 1 The place of Smith's birth has, at times, been incorrectly noted, e.g., Frances K. Smith. Catalogue of the Permanent Collection, The Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Kingston: Queen's University at Kingston, 1968. The confusion arises from the immediate proximity of Hove to the better known city of Brighton.
- 2 A substantial portion of the information set down in the following pages has been the result of a series of conversations between the artist and the author on July 10, 1974; July 19, 1974; August 29, 1974; December 15, 1975; and February 13, 1977. The first three conversations were tape recorded. Later conversations were recorded in the form of written notes. Future references to material obtained from conversations with the artist will be noted as "Smith, date."
- 3 Smith, February 13, 1977.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The Harrow County School is a publicly funded institution, located near the famous English Public School, Harrow School.
- 6 Smith, February 13, 1977.
- 7 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Anthony Emery, "Gordon Smith," Artscanada XXIII, (July, 1966), 36.
- 10 Ferdinand Eckhardt, 150 Years of Art in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970), p. 6.
- 11 Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, (1890 - 1956). B. and d. Winnipeg. Studied at A.S. Keszthelyi's School of Art, Winnipeg, and Art Students League, New York. Taught at Winnipeg School of Art from 1924. Member Group of Seven 1932 - 33, Canadian Group of Painters 1933. Visited British Columbia and Mexico. (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 422).
- 12 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 13 Smith, July 19, 1974.

- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 16 Smith, July 19, 1974, and August 29, 1974. In the course of the latter conversation, when the topic of FitzGerald's not talking about his theories was raised, Smith noted that in 1948, FitzGerald was in Vancouver, and that in fact Smith and his wife visited him on Bowen Island. At this point FitzGerald was occupied with drawing, but continued not to "say anything significant about his art" (Smith).
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, 1890 - 1956 (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1956) n.p. Extensive notes by FitzGerald, previously unpublished, are included in this catalogue. As revealed by this quote, this attitude, and particularly the drawings themselves, with their delicate cross-hatchings, subtle tonal gradations, and meticulous observation remind one of both Seurat and Cezanne, artists whom FitzGerald particularly admired. (Eckhardt, op. cit. p. 19).
- 19 FitzGerald first received significant attention as a major Canadian artist when he was asked to join the Group of Seven upon the death of J.E.H. MacDonald in 1932.
- 20 Smith, February 13, 1977. This statement is supported by the visual material in Eckhardt's catalogue (op. cit.) in which almost all the works selected as representative of the art of Manitoba are landscape oriented.
- 21 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 22 Eckhardt, op. cit. p. 68. Cf entry on Brigden's of Winnipeg.
- 23 Ibid. p. 68. Cf entries on A.O. and F.H. Brigden.
- 24 Smith, July 10, 1974. Walter Joseph Phillips, (1884 - 1963). Commercial artist, illustrator, but best known through his water colours and wood block prints which already in the 1920's and 1930's won him a world wide reputation. (Eckhardt, op. cit. pp. 97 - 98). Cf The Art of W.J. Phillips (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Company, 1970).
- 25 Eckhardt, op. cit. p. 18. Eckhardt notes that the illustrations in the Eaton's catalogue were made with wood blocks. In fact, the illustrations were made with photo-engraved plates. (Smith, February, 13, 1977).

- 26 Charles Fraser Comfort, (1900 -). B. Edinburgh, Scotland. Came to Winnipeg in 1912. Studied at the Winnipeg School of Art and Art Students League, New York. Moved to Toronto in 1925. Director of the National Gallery of Canada, 1960 - 1965. (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 421).
- 27 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid. Also, cf. David Watmough, How It Is To Be A Painter, Vancouver Sun, Friday, October 28, 1966. p. 6B.
- 30 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Official Catalogue, Contemporary Art (San Francisco: Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939).
- 33 Smith, February 13, 1977.
- 34 Ibid.

CHAPTER 2
THE WAR YEARS 1939 - 1944

The outbreak of the Second World War in September, 1939, marked the beginning of a new period in Smith's life, a period which brought with it travel, an expanded circle of acquaintances, and a development of his art. The war presented Smith with an opportunity to break with his connections in Winnipeg, to escape from the routine of working at Brigden's, and to get away from the emphasis on water colour landscape painting as practiced by most of the artists in Winnipeg and as had been taught at the WSA.

Prior to the outbreak of the war Smith was a volunteer in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, a non-permanent active militia. Smith stayed with this unit until August, 1940, first as a Rifleman then later as an NCO and finally being commissioned 2nd Lieutenant. In August, 1940, Smith had the opportunity to enlist in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Corps (PPCLI) an active military unit which was already overseas.¹

In July, 1940, knowing that he would be enlisting with the PPCLI, and going overseas, Smith took a short holiday, travelling to Vancouver where he stayed for two weeks. In the course of this visit, he met Marion Fleming, whom he visited again at Christmas that same year, at which time they became engaged. Smith again visited Vancouver in February, 1941, seeing Marion for three days. In September, 1941, Gordon was able to return to Vancouver where he and Marion were married on the 15th of that month. After the wedding, they went back to Winnipeg while Smith waited for orders to embark for England as a reinforcement officer. These orders finally arrived and Smith left to join his regiment in July, 1942. After Gordon's departure, Marion returned to Vancouver where she worked as a social worker while awaiting Gordon's return.

Joining the PPCLI was a fortunate and opportune occurrence for Smith, as the other men in the company brought with them varied and extensive backgrounds in the arts and literature. From these individuals Smith received an exposure to other areas of intellectual endeavour, of which, previously, he had been unaware. It was wide-ranging introduction to the humanities:

"It was a very flukey thing - they were more than just ordinary guys; they were very intelligent, interested in the arts and interested in what the others had to offer." 2

The Colonel of Smith's regiment was Robert Lindsay, whose career prior to the war had been that of a high school principal. Interested in the arts and literature, he encouraged the discussion of these topics in the Officers' Mess. Lindsay, pleased to have an artist enlisted in his regiment, was instrumental in arranging for Smith to design the pennant for the Company's Brigadier. It was also on Lindsay's recommendation that Smith was made Intelligence Officer for the regiment.³

The members of the regiment were interesting individuals, including people such as the writer Colin MacDougall, author of Execution and later Deputy-President of McGill University; R.F.S. Robertson, a scientist now associated with Atomic Energy of Canada; and John Darcy Horne, a graduate of the Blue Coat School in England who introduced Smith to East Indian Art, and who gave him a small sculpture of Shiva.⁴ With these men and others in the regiment, Smith discussed art, literature, and music. These talks provided an informal equivalent of a university education. Through these experiences, Smith was able to see Winnipeg in a broader context.⁵

Initially billeted at Godalming upon arriving in England, Smith was soon transferred to Eastbourne. It was a return to the area of his childhood. As London was only a short train ride away, Smith went there as often as possible. The educational aspect of Smith's army life continued in London. He attended the theatre, seeing John Gielgud in 'Love for Love', and went to piano recitals by Dame Myra Hess at the National Gallery. He also spent a great deal of time visiting the galleries:

"At the time I was interested in people like Paul Nash and his brother John Nash . . . the English Surrealists . . . Wyndham Lewis. There was not too much Graham Sutherland, but I saw some. I also saw the beginnings of Henry Moore and the Shelter Drawings. These were the things which really stuck in my mind. I also saw the occasional War Art exhibition, so I was able to get an idea of what was happening in English art at the time." 6

In addition to seeing contemporary art, Smith was also discovering more about Canadian Art. Marion had sent Gordon books on Canadian Art, such as Albert H. Robson's Canadian Landscape Painters.⁷ She also wrote to him about the Emily Carr paintings she had seen at Brock Hall, U.B.C.⁸

"I knew very little about Emily Carr at the time."⁹

Smith also learned about eastern Canadian painters from Colin MacDougall who knew many of them personally, and who also had a comprehensive knowledge of contemporary Canadian painting.¹⁰

Smith continued to sketch and to paint water colours while in England, although his opportunities for doing so were restricted by his military duties. These pursuits were relaxation for him in his off duty hours. On furlough, he went sketching, either on the South Downs, or in London, amongst the ruins in the vicinity of Saint Paul's Cathedral. He also made pencil sketches of his fellow men-at-arms.

Two small drawings in the artist's possession, Portrait of Seaman Brown, 8-5/8" x 7-1/8" (figure 1) and Portrait of Captain A.K. Guest, 8-9/16" x 5-7/8" (figure 2) are typical examples of Smith's work in 1943.¹¹ The drawings, which have been cropped, are on similar paper indicating that they were removed from the sketch book which Smith carried in his haversack.¹² Both drawings, are closely related in style, although there is a discernable difference in the handling of the medium indicating that figure 1 predates figure 2.

In figure 1, Seaman Brown is presented frontally, with his eyes averted to the right. He is wearing a naval cap and a duffle coat. A pair of binoculars is hung around his neck. In figure 2, Capt. Guest is presented in a three-quarters left profile, and is wearing a loose jacket. The similarity of the drawings lies in the linear approach to the handling of the subject matter. The emphasis in both drawings is on the containing outline, after which the modelling is filled in, as Smith had learned in Winnipeg. These two drawings also reflect the influence of the commercial draftsmanship which Smith has practiced at Brigden's. This is most noticeable in the face of figure 1, where the modelling is done with a uniform shading, such as would be effective when transferred to the printing press for catalogue illustration.

While generally similar in terms of style, a close inspection of the two drawings reveals three basic differences which would indicate a growth in Smith's ability and maturity as an artist. These drawings differ in terms of the pose and placement of the subject on the page, in the handling of the medium, and in the expression of psychological content.

In figure 1, the subject, frontally posed, is placed in the centre of the page, creating a static and symmetrical composition. In figure 2, the slightly left of centre placement of Capt. Guest, posed in three-quarter profile, gives both the impression of careful placement of the figure, as well as a slight but effective asymmetry.

In terms of the handling of the medium, two factors should be noted. Firstly, there is a difference between the two portraits in the degree of fluidity of the drawing. Figure 1 is tight and controlled, while figure 2 is loose and sketchy. Secondly, there is a marked difference in the overall handling between figure 1 and figure 2. In figure 1, the emphasis of the drawing is on the details of the head. Smith is not too concerned about the details of the coat as one's eye moves out to the shoulder areas. This imbalance in the treatment of the details, creates a sense of disjunction between the head and the torso. The head has volume while the body is flat. In the portrait of Capt. Guest, there is not such a concern for detail as in figure 1. Rather, there is a concern for a general statement of the figure expressed through an evenness of handling. The result is a three dimensional figure in space which has a volumetric unity not present in figure 1.

The differences in the pose and placement of the subject on the page, as well as the differences in the handling of the medium, contribute to the third difference between these drawings, the psychological impact. Figure 1, is basically concerned with detail. The subject looks out over the viewer's right shoulder and is concerned with the outside world. One might consider this drawing a statement of fact. In comparison, figure 2, is concerned with a general impression. The subject, partially turned away from the viewer, appears pensive and withdrawn. One is

aware, in this drawing of the subject's personality, a characteristic not evident in figure 1.

Smith's artistic growth, as seen in the differences between figure 1 and figure 2 resulted from two basic factors. Firstly, his exposure to and study of a much wider range of art than had been available in Winnipeg, and secondly, his meeting and subsequent friendship with Will Ogilvie (William A. Ogilvie, 1901 -). Ogilvie had been born in South Africa and moved to Canada in 1925. He had studied both in Johannesburg and, at a later period, the Art Students League, New York. Immediately prior to his service in the army as a war artist, he had been the Director of the Art School of the Art Association of Montreal (now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).¹³ Col. Lindsay felt that it would be natural for Smith, as an artist, to introduce Ogilvie to other members of the regiment.¹⁴

During Ogilvie's time with the PPCLI, he and Smith spent a great deal of time drawing and sketching:

"We became great friends. I learned a great deal from Will - especially in terms of looking and getting away from the wash technique of Phillips and the Winnipeg tradition. Ogilvie exposed me to the fact that you could do anything - from mixing your media, using grease resists or pastels, to scratching with razor blades - you could do anything you wanted in order to get the desired effect. Part of this was Ogilvie's own approach to water colour and part of this was the necessity of time - during the war you couldn't sit around and wait for your washes to dry. You had to work quickly. It was a great experience for me - a liberating experience and the beginning of my breaking away from the tight and controlled training I had in Winnipeg, where, if an artist had been using opaque on his water colours, it would have been damned as heretical." ¹⁵

The development observed in Smith's drawings is also evident in his water colours. Of these early works, two examples in the possession of the artist, serve to show the changes and development in Smith's style. Still Life, 4-7/16" x 7-7/8" (figure 3) was done shortly after Smith's arrival in England in 1942. A small work, figure 3 is a study of various of his personal effects. Set against the background of a salmon coloured wash are his pipe, his cap, a pencil, a water colour brush, a letter, and a sketch book. The colour range is muted, the predominant hues being the blues and browns of the objects themselves. Quebec Barracks, Inverary, Scotland, 6-3/4" x 9-7/8" (figure 4) was done in 1943 while on a sketching trip in Scotland with Ogilvie. The work is an outdoor study of three beached landing craft set against an expansive landscape. The colour scheme is predominantly of blues and greys.

Comparing the two water colours, one can see changes in the choice of subject matter, in composition, and in handling of the medium. The subject matter of figure 3 is objects close at hand. Adjusting to active military life, Smith initially had little time for water colour painting. Hence the choice of personal objects which could quickly be arranged for a small water colour study, a study very much in the manner of an art school arrangement. Figure 4, in contrast, is an outdoor study done several months later during a period of leisure.

In contrasting these two works it is noticeable that Smith has learned a great deal concerning the compositional approach to his subject matter. In Still Life there is a direct placement of the objects before the viewer, the objects tending to float in space. There is little internal unity. One perceives the objects as a mass with little relationship

between them. After viewing the objects en masse, one sees them individually. Quebec Barracks is far more unified. Rather than a direct frontal treatment of the subject matter, beached landing craft, Smith leads the viewer into the scene using the landing craft both as subject matter and visual device. One 'enters' the picture via a diagonal thrust from the lower right. The eye then crosses the landing craft, proceeding into the background. This results in a visual tension between the foreground and the background which sustains interest in the work.

In the few months between figures 3 and 4 Smith has changed his use of the water colour medium. In figure 3, the application of the colour washes is careful, controlled, and 'correct' with a strong emphasis on capturing the details of the subject matter. There is a myopic quality to this work in its concern for expressing all the minutiae. Figure 4 contrasts markedly with figure 3. The colour washes have been dragged across wet paper and allowed to bleed into each other, creating the illusion of great atmosphere depth. Details have been indicated, as in the hawser around the stern of the two front craft, instead of being carefully delineated. There is a freshness of approach and execution noticeably different from that of the Still Life. Certainly, this freedom of expression and experimentation can be attributed to Ogilvie's influence.

A few weeks after the sketching trip in Scotland, Smith's regiment embarked for the Sicilian Campaign invading Sicily on June 10, 1943. Ten days later, at Leonforte, Smith was severely wounded in the right leg. After a few days in a field hospital, he was transferred to a hospital ship which transported him to Tunisia where he spent the next

few months recuperating. When he could move about Smith spent much of his time sketching the environs and capturing impressions of the local people and the countryside.¹⁶

In November, Smith was sent back to London where he stayed until Christmas. On December 26 he left for Canada, joining Marion in Vancouver on January 10, 1944.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2

- 1 Smith, August 29, 1974; February 13, 1977.
- 2 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Colin MacDougall, Execution (London: MacMillan Co., 1958).
- 5 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 6 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 7 Albert H. Robson, Canadian Landscape Painters (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1932).
- 8 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 These two drawings were exhibited along with others by Smith in a small one man show at The Vancouver Art Gallery in April, 1944. cf. Palette (J. Delisle Parker). City Artist Sketches on the Italian Front. The Province, April 29, 1944, magazine section, 3.
- 12 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 13 J. Russell Harper, Painting in Canada op. cit. p. 427.
- 14 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 15 Gordon Smith, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1976), p. 12.
- 16 Cf. Palette. op. cit.

CHAPTER 3
VANCOUVER 1944 - 1946

Smith rejoined his wife Marion in Vancouver on January 10, 1944, a date which marked his re-entry into civilian life. This date also marked the beginning of a continuous period of strenuous activity which was to last until September, 1946. During these two and a half years, Smith's idea for a future career were formulated and acted upon. Painting, which had always been an integral part of his life now became his central concern. By the end of 1944 Smith had decided to pursue a career as a professional painter and to become an art teacher as a means of supporting himself financially, for in the mid-forties in Vancouver, it was not possible to live on the proceeds of sales. As a result of the desire to paint and the need to be a teacher, Smith spent 1945 and the first half of 1946 going to school, and obtaining the necessary academic qualifications enabling him to teach.

As with other veterans returning from active service, one of the pressing practical matters facing Smith was the finding of a job. This was complicated by the fact that Smith also had to attend therapy treatment for his wounded leg. After several forays into the job market, Smith found a job in the advertising department of The Vancouver Sun, one of Vancouver's three major daily newspapers. For the next few months, he spent his mornings at the paper and his afternoons at Shąughnessy Hospital.

Smith's job at The Vancouver Sun, silkscreening the placards which were posted at the newsstands to advertise the paper's special daily columns, did not demand much of those skills which Smith had acquired while working at Brigden's. The job did, however, provide Smith with a thorough grounding in the methods of silkscreen printing, a medium which has remained a constant element in his career.¹

In the late Spring of 1944, Smith transferred to the Art Department of The Vancouver Sun, where he worked under Paul Rand, Art Director of the lithographic section, and a well known local artist.² Working in the Art Department better suited Smith, enabling him to use the skills he had learned at Brigden's. Working with Rand gave Smith an opportunity to talk with someone in the arts about the possibilities of a future career.³ It was also an experience in painstaking craftsmanship and technique, in which Smith concentrated on lettering and design.⁴

By the end of 1944, Smith realised that the career best suited to his needs, both aesthetic and financial, was that of teaching art.⁵ This decision entailed spending the first six months of 1945 at school, obtaining two of the three academic qualifications required of an art teacher - a Normal School Diploma and First Year University. This decision also meant that Smith would have to attend one year of art school to obtain the third academic qualification, an Art School Diploma. Thus, in January, 1945, Smith faced an eighteen month educational programme.

In the six month period of January - June, 1945, Smith was enrolled in two simultaneous courses of study. The first was a day time course of accelerated study, specially designed for veterans and administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. This programme enabled Smith to get his Normal School Diploma by the end of April, 1945. The second course of study, taken at night at the King Edward High School, lasted until the end of June, 1945, crediting Smith with the equivalent of First Year University.

In the two month 'day time interval' of May - June, 1945, Smith secured a part-time job, teaching art at both the Selkirk and the Lord Strathcona Schools, an experience which further reinforced his decision to be an art teacher.⁶ In July, following the end of this part-time job and his evening classes, Smith returned to The Vancouver Sun, where he again worked with Paul Rand until the end of August, when he left to enroll in the Vancouver School of Art (VSA).⁷

With this move, Smith effectively entered the Vancouver 'art scene'. While there had existed various sketch clubs and art societies in Vancouver since the incorporation of the city in 1886, realistically, one can only speak of an 'art scene' in Vancouver as dating from the opening of the VSA in 1925, a date which also saw the beginnings of efforts to establish a civic art gallery.⁸ In 1945, the 'art scene' was, at best, twenty years old. Public support for the arts in all fields, let alone the visual arts, was limited both numerically and intellectually. Given Vancouver's youth, its relative lack of sophistication, and its geographical isolation from any major centre, the situation in Vancouver was fundamentally provincial. In 1945, interest in contemporary visual art in Vancouver centered around the Vancouver School of Art and the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) established in 1931.

One concrete result of the activities of those interested in the visual arts, was the opening of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts in the fall of 1925, under the direction of Charles H. Scott.⁹ As is indicated by the original name (changed to the Vancouver School of Art in 1933) the emphasis of the teaching in the first years

was towards a practical application of art, with classes being given in drawing, painting, commercial art, costume design, china painting, and teacher's classes.¹⁰

This initial direction towards a craft application of the arts slowly changed over the next few years with the appointment of F.H. Varley (1881-- 1969) to teach drawing and painting, and of J.W.G. MacDonald (1897 - 1960) to teach design and crafts.¹¹ Grace W. Melvin joined the staff in 1928, teaching classes in lettering.¹² Although the classes taught still basically emphasized the application of art to commercial design, the staff now comprised a qualified and professionally trained personnel whose concerns were those of art, rather than art as applied to commercial ends. The result, as noted in a lecture at the VAG in January, 1975 by Jack Shadbolt, a leading Vancouver painter and a student of the VSA at the time, was a gradual turning towards the more formal aspects of art, and a turning away from an emphasis on commercial design.¹³ The overall impression one gets, however, from reading the Vancouver School of Art calendars of the early years, is that the VSA was still pre-emminently a place for 'applied and decorative' art. It was also, in the late 1920's and early 1930's, regarded by many of the leading Vancouver families as a form of finishing school where one's daughters might learn the suitable artistic graces.¹⁴ For the first few years, the vast proportion of students was female. It was only around 1930, that one could see the enrolment of students who were later to become serious and leading artists in Vancouver.¹⁵

During the 1930's, the fortunes of the VSA paralleled those of the general economy, suffering extreme financial cutbacks in these Depression years. As a result of the financial position of the VSA, which

necessitated major salary cutbacks, and of their treatment there, Varley and MacDonald left the VSA to found their own art school, the British Columbia College of Arts, which lasted from 1933 - 1935.¹⁶

In 1933, the year when Varley and MacDonald left the VSA, Bertram Charles Binning (Bert Binning), later an important and influential artist and teacher, as well as founder of the Fine Arts Department at the University of British Columbia in 1949, joined the staff upon his graduating from the VSA.¹⁷ With a small staff and a minimal budget, the VSA managed to carry on during the Depression years. Toward the end of the 1930's the financial picture of the VSA improved somewhat with Jack Shadbolt being hired in 1938 to teach painting.¹⁸

In the development of painting in Vancouver and by extension, British Columbia, during the 1930's and 1940's, the VSA was a central factor, as most of the serious artists in Vancouver were in some way connected with the school, either as teachers or as students. During the Second World War, the staff of the VSA comprised Scott, Melvin, Fred Amess (who joined the staff in 1934, and was subsequently principal from 1957 to 1970), Binning and Shadbolt.

Age, training, and aesthetic outlook separated these five individuals: Scott, Melvin, Amess, and Binning, Shadbolt. Scott and Melvin had received their training at the Glasgow School of Art and brought this influence to bear on both the method of study and the structure of the academic programmes at the VSA. Amess, who had been a student at the VSA in the thirties, was sympathetic to this approach.¹⁹

This academic programme was based on a four year period of study in which one started with drawing as the first of a series of steps

leading to working with oil on canvas. In addition to this carefully structured approach, it should also be noted that the attitudes and ideas of Scott, Melvin, and Amess were predominantly attuned to the examples of British painters of the first part of the twentieth century. In fact, Scott did not view abstraction with any degree of favour.²⁰

Those elements of experimentation with and interest in recent developments in contemporary art were provided by Binning and Shadbolt. It was they who provided the impetus for a tentative probing and examination of the then current art as well as that of the late 1940's and the early 1950's. This grouping of the staff does not imply definite division between an 'old guard' and an 'avant garde'. Rather, what should be pointed out is that Binning and Shadbolt, as a result of their more recent educational experiences away from Vancouver, brought with them an awareness of recent developments in art, a knowledge which was not readily available in Vancouver.²¹ Binning and Shadbolt provided a stimulus for an awakening of interest in contemporary art for those students so attracted. It was from this group, as well as the artists who moved to Vancouver in the late 1940's that was formed the group of artists who were later referred to as a 'school'.²²

The other major factor in the development of the visual arts in Vancouver was the formation of the Vancouver Art Gallery Association, or as it is now referred to, The Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG). The drive to establish the VAG was headed by a local businessman, Henry A. Stone (1861 - 1943), whose idea, shared by others, was that the city needed an art school as well as an art gallery. The art school was to teach and train the artists, while the art gallery was to provide a forum where their work could be shown and where they could study good examples of art.

There had been, however, greater difficulty in persuading the City Hall to back the idea of an art gallery than there had been in persuading the City Hall to create an art school. No doubt the art school was a more 'practical' objective upon which to spend the taxpayers' money. Hence the six year difference between the opening dates of the two institutions.

Stone, a man of considerable drive and perserverance, had, in the mid-twenties, brought together a group of ten - families, individuals, and businesses - each of whom pledged \$10,000 toward the erection of a building and the purchase of a permanent collection. Both would be donated to the city on the condition that the latter provide both a suitable site and the annual operating funds.²³ In 1930, the city provided the location for what is now the western third of the present gallery at 1145 West Georgia Street, and a building was constructed.

The original section of the VAG (enlarged in 1951) was a small building of approximately 5,000 square feet which comprised the present five western galleries - north gallery, west, centre, and east courts, and the south gallery - office space for the Curator and his secretary, as well as a small library. One of the more charming and picturesque aspects of the building was the Art Deco frieze across the facade, with busts of Michaelangelo and Rembrandt gracing each side of the entrance. A caretaker's suite in the basement further reduced the already inadequate storage space.

In 1930, with the building under construction, Stone and Charles Scott travelled to England to purchase those works which were to form the nucleus of the new permanent collection. The founding group had decided that the basis of the collection was to be "a selection of the

work of British artists from the earliest days of British art".²⁴ In London, Stone and Scott contacted Sir Charles Holmes, former Director of the National Gallery, who gave his advice on which works to buy.²⁵

The resulting collection comprised a broad range of oils, water colours, drawings and prints, as well as a few pieces of sculpture, all from the 17th to the early 20th centuries. Included were paintings by George Morland, Sir David Wilkie, and David Cox; water colours by Thomas Hearne, Alexander Cozens, John Sell Cotman, and Thomas Girtin, while of the sculptures, the most significant piece was Head of a Girl by Sir Jacob Epstein.²⁶ Stone et al were pleased with their results:

"We could easily have purchased a mixed collection to please the public taste which would have been of little use to the art student and probably lose interest and value in years to come, whilst a collection of single examples of British art is unique on this continent and as such will, as the years go by gain in reputation and value. It was a bold decision as the money we had to buy a collection would not have purchased one of the many pictures in the National Gallery. However, we did our best and gained Sir Charles' approval when we showed him photographs of our first two or three weeks."²⁷

In the ensuing years, Stone's optimistic forecast for the importance of the collection did not materialize. In reality, most of the works purchased were unimportant pieces by secondary painters of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Notable exceptions to this observation are Henry Fuseli's Dream of Belinda, and the body of late 18th and early 19th century British water colours.

In general terms, Stone's comments can be taken as typical of that segment of the general public in Vancouver which could or would support the visual arts. Noticeable is the emphasis on British art and the

equal lack of interest in or knowledge of Continental European painting of the twentieth century. Even their knowledge of contemporary British Art seems limited, as shown by the purchase of a work such as Bateman's Cows in the Rick Yard, while artists such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash, and others were passed over. Given such a restrictive knowledge of art, the creation of an art gallery to specialize in British Art for the people living on the West Coast of British Columbia can only be described as colonial.

The interplay of The Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver School of Art formed the basis of the artistic community in Vancouver when Smith enrolled at the VSA in the fall of 1945. During the year 1945 - 1946, Smith took drawing from Binning and painting from Shadbolt. He also took classes from Scott and Melvin in their respective specialties. As well as his studies, Smith taught lettering classes twice a week to help the VSA cope with the surging enrolment caused by the returning veterans.

In the spring of 1946, Smith graduated with his Art School Diploma, thus obtaining the necessary qualifications to be an art teacher. In September of 1946, Smith joined the staff of the Vancouver School of Art.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 3

- 1 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 2 Paul Rand, (1896 - 1970). Born in Bonn, Germany. Attended art school at Frankfurt am Main for one year before coming to Canada in 1912. Studied at the Vancouver School of Art at night classes under Varley, MacDonald and Scott. Became a commercial artist in 1934, later joining the Sun Publishing Co., in 1939. Later art Director of the Lithographic section. Taught at the Polytechnic Institute, Vancouver, 1937; Life drawing for the Services at Vancouver Barracks, 1944. (Vancouver Art Gallery Library, Biographical file).
- 3 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Smith, July 10, 1974. Cf. also David Watmough, How It Is To Be A Painter, op. cit.
- 6 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For an in-depth study of the early art activities in Vancouver cf. William Wylie Thom, "The Fine Arts in Vancouver, 1886 - 1930: An Historical Survey" (M.A. Thesis, Department of Fine Arts, University of British Columbia, April, 1969).
- 9 Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, Calendar, 1925 - 1926. Charles Scott, (1886 - 1964). B. Newmilne, Ayrshire, Scotland. Studied at Glasgow School of Art and in Belgium, Holland, and Germany. Moved to Calgary 1912; subsequently in Vancouver. Principal of Vancouver School of Art 1925 - 52. D. Vancouver. (J. Russell Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 428).
- 10 Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, Calendar, 1926 - 1927. Listed as the Staff were:
 Charles H. Scott - Principal - Drawing, Painting, and Commercial Art.
 Charles Marega - Modelling. "Marega, 1876 - 1939, was born in Genoa, Italy. He came to Vancouver in 1910. He was responsible for many of the early large-scale sculptures in the city, including those of the lions at the south entrance of the Lion's Gate Bridge, as well as that of Capt. Vancouver (City Hall).

Mrs. F. Hood - Drawing and painting.
 Mrs. Sharland - Costume design.
 S.P. Judge - Teachers' classes.
 S.J. Bryant - Saturday morning classes.
 F.J. Simpson - Saturday morning classes.

- 11 Frederick Horseman Varley, (1881 - 1969). B. Sheffield England.
 Studied at Sheffield School of Art and Antwerp Academy.
 Commercial artist, London, England 1904 - 08, Sheffield
 1908 - 11, in Toronto since 1945. ARCA 1922. Member of
 the Group of Seven 1920, Canadian Group of Painters 1933.
 D. Unionville. (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit.
 p. 429).
- James W.G. (Jock) MacDonald, (1897 - 1960). B. Thursco, Scotland.
 Studied at Edinburgh College of Art to 1922; fabric de-
 signer 1922 - 25. Taught at Lincoln School of Art, at
 Vancouver School of Art 1926 - 1933, at the British
 Columbia College of Arts, Vancouver 1933 - 35, and at
 the Ontario College of Art after 1947. Member Canadian
 Group of Painters 1933, Painters Eleven. D. Toronto.
 (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 426).
- Fred Amess, (1909 - 1970). B. England, 1909, Amess came to Canada in
 1913. He studied at the VSA, graduating in 1929. In 1934
 he became a full-time instructor at the VSA. In 1957, be-
 came the principal of the VSA, which position he held
 until his death. (Vancouver Art Gallery library, Bio-
 graphical files).
- 12 Grace A. Melvin, B. Scotland. Came to Vancouver in 1926 to teach
 Design at the Vancouver School of Art. Remained at the
 VSA as Head of the Department of Design until 1951.
- 13 Jack L. Shadbolt, informal lecture at the VAG, January, 1975.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 B.C. Binning enrolled in 1929, E.J. Hughes enrolled in 1929, and
 Orville Fisher enrolled in 1930.
- 16 Charles C. Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: The
 National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 57.
- 17 Bertram Charles Binning, (1909 - 1976). B. Medicine Hat, Alberta.
 Studied at Vancouver School of Art, Art Students League,
 New York, in London with Henry Moore. Taught at Vancouver
 School of Art, Head of Art Department, UBC 1949 -
 (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 420).
 Binning remained at U.B.C. until 1968.

- 18 Jack Leonard Shadbolt, (1909 -). B. Shoeburyness, England. Studied in London with Victor Pasmore; in Paris with Lhote; and at the Art Students League, New York. (J.R. Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit. p. 429).
- 19 Smith, February 13, 1977.
- 20 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 21 Binning studied in London in 1939, with Moore and Ozenfant. Cf. Doreen Walker. B.C. Binning. op. cit. Shadbolt studied in England at the Euston Road School in 1936, and later that year in Paris with Othon Friesz and Andre Lhote. Cf. Jack Shadbolt (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1969).
- 22 R.H. Hubbard, "A Climate for the Arts," op. cit. p. 139. In this article as well as Ostiguy, "The First Biennial of Canadian Painting," as well as standard references such as Harper, op. cit., and Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, the core of artists referred to as The Painters of The West Coast are: B.C. Binning, Jack Shadbolt, Don Jarvis, Lionel Thomas, Peter Aspell, Bruno Bobak, Molly Bobak, and Gordon Smith.
- 23 Henry A. Stone, "Notes on the Founding of the Vancouver Art Gallery," The Vancouver Art Gallery Bulletin, IX (October, 1941), n.p.
Stone's history of the founding of the VAG is the most complete and concise available. There are, as well, scattered undated newspaper clippings in the VAG files which discuss the efforts of Stone et al. to establish an art gallery. It is in reports such as these that one finds phrases such as "camping on the steps of City Hall", which indicate the nature of the struggle to establish the gallery.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Sir Charles Holmes, (1868 - 1936). Director of the National Gallery, London, 1916 - 1928.
- 26 The new permanent collection of the VAG was listed in the Souvenir Catalogue, Opening Exhibition, October 5, 1931. Listed were all the works purchased by Stone and Scott, as well as other donations to the permanent collection.
- 27 Henry A. Stone, op. cit.

CHAPTER 4

VANCOUVER 1946 - 1951

In September 1946, having just graduated from the VSA, Smith was asked to join the staff of the school as the Instructor of Graphics, Design, and Commercial Art.¹ This, his first full-time position as a teacher, fulfilled some of the aspirations about a future career which Smith had had prior to the Second World War while a student at the Winnipeg School of Art.² The position marked the beginning of his career in education, which was to parallel his career as an artist, and which enabled him to pursue his independent activities as a painter, as he now had some financial security.³ Even more important than the financial aspect of working at the VSA, was the daily contact that existed between the artists working there, artists concerned with contemporary painting, who would be central to the development of art in Vancouver in the next decade.⁴ This close daily contact among these artists was invaluable to all of them, for it provided them with a focus for their activities, as well as giving a form of moral support for each of them in his respective work.

During the ten years following the Second World War, Vancouver was a small, albeit growing, provincial city, geographically isolated on the west coast of Canada. In 1946 the main industries in the province were mining, forestry, and fishing and Vancouver functioned basically as the major western port of Canada, being the terminus of both the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway. Transcontinental air service had only been in operation since May 1939, and in 1946 it was still a novelty. Rail travel was the major form of passenger movement

across the country. Fundamentally, therefore, Vancouver was five days away from the major eastern urban centres.

Support for the arts in the city was maintained by a core of amateur groups or artistic societies whose numbers remained fairly constant. It was this small core of supporters which attempted to keep Vancouver's various cultural endeavours alive.⁵ The cultural ambience of Vancouver in the late 1940's was summed up by George Woodcock in a 1974 article in which he described the 'scene' of 1949:

"What I missed most about Canada when I came here was a kind of intellectual and artistic community that I was used to and that now exists so abundantly here . . . Of course there was a community with which I came in contact, but so tenuous in character, that I was often reminded of Auden's lines:

'Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironie points of light
Flashout wherever the Just
Exchange their messages.'" 6

For the artist teaching at the VSA, the School, of necessity, became a place for discussion and the exchange of ideas.

That the VSA should become a centre for the artists teaching there, was a result of the rapid growth in the student body at the School in the years 1945-47, which was paralleled by an equally rapid growth in the size of the staff. The classes given at the VSA immediately after the Second World War were perhaps more closely allied to what might have been given at a vocational school. Courses were designed to cope with the demands of training large numbers of veterans for careers in civilian life, rather than to train them to be artists as one would normally expect in an art school. As a result, in these immediately post-war years

there were a great number of professional artists teaching courses at the VSA, which did not relate directly to their individual professional specialties.

If the number of professional artists at the VSA grew rapidly in the late 1940's, public support for the work of these artists did not. Collectors of contemporary art were few, and sales were infrequent.⁷ Opportunities to exhibit work were limited to two major group shows held annually at the VAG, one in the Spring and one in the Fall.⁸ There were no commercial galleries interested in displaying the work of local artists. One did not make a living selling art in Vancouver. Hence, the VSA achieved a position of significance for these local artists. It provided them with a financial basis and a centre of stimulation in an otherwise relatively barren environment. It was in this milieu that Smith started to teach and that he also had time to think and to talk about those painting activities which he pursued at home.

Of the three courses which Smith taught, Graphics, Design, and Commercial Art, the Graphics course was central. In most instances, the difficult artistic problems posed in Design and Commercial Art could be solved in terms of the graphic processes.⁹ In 1946-47 at the School, these processes were represented simply by a silkscreen press. Establishing this silkscreen press and teaching a course in serigraphy, Smith drew upon his extensive practical experience gained at The Vancouver Sun. The implementation of the silkscreen course marked a beginning, for Smith and the VSA, of several years of involvement with the graphic processes,

by the end of which had been added to the School's equipment both in-taglio and lithographic presses.¹⁰

While Smith's hours at the VSA were concerned with aspects of print making, his hours at home were concerned with the problems of painting. It was, however, fortunate that Smith was involved with the Graphics course at the VSA, for the formal concerns of the course paralleled the concerns and problems which he was facing in his painting. In the three years which followed September 1946, the central issue with which he was concerned in his painting was that of the two-dimensionality of the canvas, or, as Smith put it, 'the space of the canvas':

"At that point I was concerned with my awareness of the space, or the flatness, of the canvas. I know that today this sounds like a very obvious thing, but at the time it was a major concern of mine." 11

A process of discovery and experimentation was to become Smith's single preoccupation in painting and graphic work until the period around 1950. His graphic work of the period 1946 - 1950 was either in the form of silkscreen prints or of etchings.¹²

These etchings, besides revealing something generally about Smith's style at this time, also show two salient characteristics about Smith himself, characteristics which have remained constant in his career as an artist. The first of these characteristics is a concern with experimentation and exploration of new areas of expression, indicating his desire to expand the boundaries of his experience. The second characteristic revealed in these three early etchings (albeit in a still skeletal fashion) is a pattern of development and growth in his art, a pattern that

has been repeated throughout his career. That is, given any medium to work in, Smith's ability to exploit it develops from a fairly tight, almost restricted approach, into a fluid and more abstract handling, in which there is a lessening of the detailed depiction of subject matter. This pattern of development, already noticed in the wartime sketches, is evident in the graphic work of 1946 on, and it is present in the paintings of this same period. The pattern is most completely expressed (in the period of Smith's life covered by this thesis) in the paintings of 1951-55.

While teaching serigraphy at the VSA during the academic year 1946-47, Smith was experimenting on his own with the etching process (later he taught a course in etching at the VSA). His initial attempts at etching had started in August 1946, just prior to his employment at the VSA.¹³ Using simple equipment and some technical advice from Charles H. Scott, he produced a few etchings over the next few months. There are three modest-sized etchings of this period in the artist's collection: Point Atkinson, Study, and Nature Forms. While these three works are each concerned with different subject matter - naturalistic landscape, the human figure, and a free composition based on forms taken from the landscape - there is an underlying thread that joins them together, and that indicates how Smith's approach to a medium tends to develop. In these three etchings, there can be seen developing an emphasis on the clarification of line, a use of line as a means of accentuating forms and their inter-relationships, and a movement toward abstraction.

Point Atkinson, 5-11/16"x 7-3/8" (figure 5) is Smith's first etching, done in August 1946.¹⁴ The main motif of the etching, the Point Atkinson Lighthouse, Vancouver, is placed slightly left of centre, in the middle ground. It is seen across the foreground, which depicts the rocky promontory on which the lighthouse is located. The background indicates a turbulent sky of clouds. Forms are built up with nervous, scratchy parallel lines which specify the details of the site and of the buildings.

Study, 11-11/16" x 5-5/8" (figure 6) shows a technical improvement over Point Atkinson, and is a work of some accomplishment. The subject, a semi-draped female figure holding a brush, is seen from the back.¹⁵ This work, twice as large as Point Atkinson, demonstrates a much surer grasp of technique, a grasp that is expressed in the linear quality of the image. In Point Atkinson, there is an overall effect created by the use of scratchy parallel lines, whereas in Study the concentration of the artist's effort is upon the definition of form through a minimum of clear and vigorous lines. With more economy, Smith, in Study, had indicated the volume and weight of the figure, as well as giving it a psychological presence.

Having shown a degree of competence and familiarity with the etching medium, Smith went on to further experimentation, this time more obviously with 'the problem of the canvas (plate)'. Nature Forms, 10-9/16" x 6-3/4", 1947/48 (figure 7), while perhaps not as visually successful or satisfying as either Point Atkinson or Study, is certainly more ambitious

than either of them, and it is the most interesting of these three works. It (figure 7) illustrates the fundamental problem with which Smith concerned himself in the years immediately following 1946: the flatness of the pictorial surface and the depiction of figurative subject matter on that surface. The subject matter of this etching is a landscape composed of various stock landscape details typical of the west coast - fern fronds, coniferous trees, tree trunks, mountains and the sea. The etching is left unresolved, there being a conflict between the demands of realism and those of abstraction. Essentially, the forms are rendered as flat patterns, with the exception of the fern fronds in the lower centre foreground, which have volume and which serve to indicate a considerable amount of three dimensional space at the bottom of the etching. The upper four fifths of the etching is composed of flattened shapes representing the other landscape elements. These flattened shapes overlap in some areas to give the impression of receding space, while other areas, such as in the upper fifth of the etching, they abut on each other and serve to emphasize the flatness of the overall pictorial surface. These complexities leave the viewer with the impression that Smith is aware of modes of abstraction.¹⁶ Noticeably, the upper third of the work is reminiscent of the work of Lionel Feininger, c.1913. At this point in Smith's work, abstraction appears to be a formula to be applied to the depiction of objects, rather than an end in itself.

These graphic works can be seen as problem solving forays related to the concerns of Smith's paintings of the same time. Speaking of his graphic works Smith has noted:

"It (the graphic work) is a change when my work is going badly. I feel less responsible for what happens; the technique creates the forms to some extent. I often get new forms and ideas in this way, and this in turn helps my painting." 17

Of the paintings done after September 1946, Smith exhibited a selection of approximately ten works in the cafeteria of the VSA (figure 8) in the Spring of 1948. This was not a one-man exhibition, but rather an exhibition of VSA faculty work. As can be seen from the photograph, (figure 8) these paintings were easel sized works, the largest being approximately 24" x 36".¹⁸

Several general observations might be made about this exhibition, regarding Smith's painting in the period following his graduation from the VSA 1946-48. Firstly, in this period, his approach is basically naturalistic, incorporating a high degree of detail. Secondly, the subject matter which interests him is that of the west coast of Canada, such as local scenery and the imagery of the indigenous Indian culture. Thirdly, there is an obvious and strong element of pictorial experimentation. Fourthly, the overall style of these works is one which would be generally identified as belonging to the thirties.

While a great deal of specific information cannot be gleaned from the photograph of the exhibition, certain aspects about the individual paintings can be noted and certain influences remarked upon. With reference to the image of the Point Atkinson painting, and to a lesser degree the manner in which the forms echo each other, one is aware of the presence of Lawren Harris. Specifically, one thinks of Harris'

painting, Lighthouse, Father Point.¹⁹ The second painting from the left, Alert Bay, is a different type of painting.²⁰ The change between this work and Point Atkinson is a change from the scenic manner to the anecdotal. With the inclusion of an Indian woman in the lower left foreground of Alert Bay, an element of social comment is introduced, as in Jack Shadbolt's work of the same period.²¹

The two paintings of totem poles bear immediate reference to the work of Emily Carr (d. 1945), both in terms of the choice of subject matter and in terms of their specific reference to certain subject matter and in terms of their specific reference to certain of Carr's paintings.²² The painting of the two totems (third from right) is akin to Carr's Kitwancool Totems, while the painting of the single totem, (immediate right) is close to Zunoqua of the Cat Village.²³ While an affinity with Carr's work is evident, Smith's paintings are quite different from those of the earlier painter, in that they lack the intensity of expression and empathy with the Indians, which forms such an important part of Carr's work. Smith's adoption of the Indian imagery is a straight-forward application of visual material as well as reflecting a concern for the aboriginal inheritance of the province.

Noticeable in these two paintings of totem poles by Smith is the strong emphasis on the surface of the canvas. While depth is indicated in the background of both paintings, the overall impression in both of them is one of the totems being immediately at the front of the scene. In the painting of the two totems, one has the impression that the totems are almost pushing out of the canvas, and that the background

is merely a backdrop. In the painting of the single totem, which is more pointedly sympathetic in its concern for the 'space of the canvas', the hands of the totemic figure are parallel to and flat on the surface of the canvas. While these two paintings are still tentative with respect to this placing of the subject matter flat on the surface of the canvas, they do provide the first evidence of Smith's concern for and awareness of the fundamental two-dimensionality of that surface.

In addition to the sense of experimentation evident in Smith's paintings in this exhibition, one should take note of the range of his palette.²⁴ In these early paintings, the range of colours used centres about the basic colours of the west coast, i.e., blues, greens, and earth tones. This colour range, as well as the fairly strong and intense hue values he used at this time, was to remain a constant in Smith's paintings for the next two years (1948-50).

Of the various other general characteristics of Smith's paintings, c.1948, which one can gather from the photograph of this exhibition, (figure 8) the most noticeable is that of the experimentation and exploration of form. While these paintings are, to a large degree, naturalistic representations of an observed scene or object, they are also exercises in working with different stylistic approaches. One is reminded of various of Cezanne's paintings of houses in the region of Estaches.²⁵

This employment of idioms of late nineteenth and early (pre-1939) twentieth century European painting, reveals the general level of

awareness amongst the visually educated in Vancouver in 1948. In these paintings by Smith, shown at the VSA cafeteria, one can detect the influence of his teachers at the VSA, of people outside the VSA, and of the paintings that could be seen at The Vancouver Art Gallery in the immediately post-war years. Looking at these paintings, by Smith, one can see that he was starting to catch up with the developments of twentieth century western European painting. He applied the formal inventions of this painting to local subject matter, but he did not push his experiments to their limit. Ultimately, with their close modelling and articulation of form, these paintings remain most closely allied to the general trends of painting in Canada in the thirties.²⁶

1948 was a year of consolidation and new beginnings for Smith. At the age of twenty-nine, he had experienced a long period of training, both practical and academic, in the areas of drawing, water colour, graphics, and oil painting. He was established as both a teacher and a painter, and at the centre of a growing artistic community. The late 1940's was a time of considerable enthusiasm for both Smith and the other Vancouver artists, during which they took part in various activities which reinforced for them a new sense of place and of purpose. During this period, Smith built a house, as did many of the other artists in Vancouver.²⁷ The artists were close friends, and frequently gathered at each others' studios to talk and socialize.²⁸

While print making, drawing, and water colour remained important to Smith, painting with oil on canvas now became his primary

form of work. In the seven years following 1948, he moved away from the tentative searchings which had characterized the paintings exhibited in the VSA cafeteria. In this period (1948 - 1955) he developed a more personal style of painting, one which still however, reflected his training and the milieu in which he worked, as well as the educational opportunities of which he had availed himself. The paintings of the period 1948-55 form another example of the cyclical pattern of growth which has been discussed above. In exploring the problem of the 'space of the canvas', Smith's paintings of 1948-55 develop from a form of somewhat abstracted naturalism, to a form of lyrical abstraction based on the landscape elements of the west coast, in which the 'gesture of painting' becomes the dominant painterly concern.²⁹

The paintings of these years fall into two distinct periods: 1948 to the late Spring of 1950, and the Fall of 1950 to 1955. These two periods are separated by the Summer of 1950, during which Smith attended the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Prior to the San Francisco trip, Smith's paintings were thickly painted compositions using Cubist devices to emphasize the flatness of the picture plane. Following the San Francisco trip and his exposure there to gestural, non-figurative painting in the manner of Jackson Pollock, Smith's paintings from 1950-55 become increasingly concerned with the act of painting, in which the surface and the 'image' on it are one.

Eight of those paintings have been chosen for the purposes of discussion here, to clearly outline the development which occurs in Smith's art within the two periods, 1948-50 and 1950-55. They are:

STILL LIFE	1948/49
MELON AND LEMON	1949
VERTICAL ABSTRACTION	1950/51
BARE TREES	1952
WET NIGHT	1953
BURRARD BRIDGE	1954
ORCHARD	1954
STRUCTURE WITH RED SUN	1955

The development of Smith's work 1948-55, was certainly less linear than the choice of these eight works would indicate. From 1948 - 1955 Smith painted in the neighbourhood of 150 paintings, in which he attempted to work through the problems of successfully incorporating an image, a freedom in the handling of paint, and an awareness of the picture plane into his work. But the eight works were discussed by the artist as being significant and representative of his development 1948-55; and it was also on the suggestion of the artist, after discussion with the writer, that these eight works were chosen for inclusion in Smith's retrospective exhibition at The Vancouver Art Gallery, April 1976.

Still Life, 15¼" x 13½", 1948/49 (figure 9) provides a starting point from which one can trace the development of Smith's work of the following seven years. A small work, it contains standard elements for a still life study - a plant set on a table against the backdrop of a wall. The cubist-derived arrangement is betrayed by the tilt-top perspective of the table and the flower pot. This work is closely related to the paintings exhibited at the VSA, in that it continues the colour schemes of rich blues and greens which are, in this work, accentuated by the deep orange and red tones of the flower pot.

What is noticeable in this work is the clear statement of the

two basic concerns which would characterize Smith's painting style as it emerged in the following years: the concern for the flat space of the canvas, and the concern for the inherent qualities of the paint per se. Beyond the representation of the actual still life elements, the work does achieve 'flatness', but it is a flatness more concerned with a decorative pattern in the background than with the overall conception of the image as it relates to the picture plane. The pigment in Still Life is thickly applied, with the background area full of dense scumbling. This manipulative and expressive use of the paint reflects the study which Smith made c.1948 of the contemporary American painter, Bradley Walker Tomlin (1889 - 1953).³⁰

Melon and Lemon, 41" x 23", 1949 (figure 10) continues the spatial and material concerns of Still Life. This work is also the largest canvas Smith had attempted up to this point, being approximately four and a half times as large as Still Life. While Melon and Lemon starts with the idea of a still life - melon wedges and a lemon placed on a wrought iron chair - the actual depiction of the objects is not the primary concern. Although the objects of the still life are emphasized, there is an almost equal attention paid to the background. This results in passages such as the treatment of the chair legs, where the object and the background merge into one. This merging effect is continued elsewhere in the work in the handling of the colour. The melon and lemon are highlighted by their treatment in brilliant red and yellow, yet their importance to the composition is muted by the attention given to the application of the paint in the background. This integration of the objects of

the painting with the background takes Smith's concern for the 'space of the canvas' a little further.

In this painting Smith introduces, for the first time, strong black lines to outline and define the main objects. These dark linear elements, while indicating the volume of the melon and the lemon, reduce the rest of the still life elements to a flat decorative pattern through which the background emerges. The effect is similar to that of a stained glass window. The use of the heavy black line as a form defining structural element was something which Smith "stumbled onto" in 1949, and it was to be an important aspect of his painting after 1950.³¹

In the Spring of 1949, Smith attended a lecture at The Vancouver Art Gallery, given by Douglas McAgee, Director of the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. In the course of the lecture, McAgee described his school, as well as the general art community of that city. The idea of attending the California School of Fine Arts thus entered Smith's mind and, in 1950, he decided that he would actually go there. In June 1950, Gordon and Marion drove from Vancouver to San Francisco, where he enrolled in the July/August session of the California School of Fine Arts, taking the advanced painting class as well as a class in lithography.

The summer months spent at The California School of Fine Arts were to prove of crucial importance in the future development of Smith's painting. The time has remained vividly in Smith's memory:

"In 1950 I enrolled at an advanced painting class at the California School of Art. It so happened that Herb Gilbert was also enrolling in the class, so the two of us took the course together. I worked under Elmer Bischoff that summer.

Bischoff, who was a fairly figurative painter, was then painting complete abstractions. He said on the first day we were there, 'O.K. Start painting and I'll be back next Tuesday' - this was on a Friday. He also said to paint a fairly good-sized canvas. So Herb and I went to the lumber yard and got some 1 x 2's, stretched some canvas, and we painted. At that particular time I thought you just 'can't go to a place and just sort of paint the landscape or whatever. So we went out on the coast and we made drawings of rocks, etc. We really worked at it. After 3 or 4 days we had these fairly solid Sutherland-like thorny forms. On Tuesday Bischoff came back. In the meantime there was this big black man, who had got a stretcher that was about 9 feet - I'm not exaggerating. He had nailed a bedspread to this wonky stretcher and had the thing on the floor. He was taking black paint and pouring it on and rubbing it with his hands - he got black paint all over. Well, we thought, 'My God, this guy is mad.' Coming from Vancouver we just weren't prepared for this.

When Bischoff returned he didn't even look at our canvases, or so it seemed. He went up to this guy, got very excited, called us around and talked about this painting all morning. He then told us, 'I want you to put these things away and start on a big canvas. Get at least a 60" canvas and I want you to go down to the school shop, buy Fuller's house paint and just start painting. Don't start with anything in mind, just start painting. Just put some paint or some colour down.' There were about 12 of us in the class and we were all astounded, half were furious, as it appeared that Bischoff hadn't even looked at our canvases; so they went to the director to complain. Herb and I figured we had come this far, so we'd stick it out and see what happened. So we did what he told us to do. I put

my canvas on the floor and started playing around with this paint. It became for me an exciting experience just manipulating paint. It was the best damn thing that happened, it was a real shock treatment. We got into the act of painting. That was our subject matter and that's what we did. I know this is old hat now, but at the time it was absolutely new and a revelation. It was a wonderful experience, something that helped me loosen up my painting." 2

At the end of August 1950, Smith returned to Vancouver, bringing with him a large roll of canvases he had done while in San Francisco. These San Francisco works were large, six foot paintings done in a gestural, non-figurative style. Smith showed them to the other artists in Vancouver, but there was very little reaction to them. No one in Vancouver seemed to appreciate or understand these paintings.³³ Through the Fall of 1950 and the first few months of 1951, Smith continued to paint canvases in this same vein, smaller than those done in San Francisco, but still much larger than those he had been doing prior to his trip to California.³⁴

Vertical Abstraction, 59" x 29½", 1950/51 (figure 11) remains as a major statement of Smith's work immediately following the San Francisco experience. The painting shows the unmistakable influence of Clifford Still who had been working in San Francisco just before Smith's visit there, and with whose work Smith had become familiar. The picture surface of Vertical Abstraction is built up of freely brushed areas of greys and greens, arranged about an underlying rectilinear format. Somewhat larger than Melon and Lemon, Vertical Abstraction is closely related to it. In it, Smith had now dropped the need for 'subject matter' and had begun to concern himself solely with the 'background', painting it in a

loose and gestural manner.

In the Spring of 1951, Smith turned from this non-figurative style of painting to a style which was more concerned with abstraction. That this happened was the result of a number of factors, the principal one being Smith's own desire to work with an image as the subject matter or starting point of the canvas:

"I continued to paint freely and gesturally for a while, but found that I was attracted to some sort of image . . ." 34

Several other influences in Vancouver at this time, contributed to this change in Smith's style. These influences included the milieu at the VSA, where Smith was teaching; the cultural climate of Vancouver; the exhibitions to be seen at the VAG; as well as the public's support of contemporary British painting. Smith's own desire for 'an image', together with the influence of these other factors, resulted in an alliance in his work, of the freedom of painterly expression, newly learned in San Francisco, and the imagery of the west coast.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 4

- 1 Vancouver School of Art, Calendar 1946-47.
- 2 Cf. footnote 9, Chapter 1.
- 3 Smith taught at the Vancouver School of Art from September 1946 to June 1956. Since September, 1956, Smith has taught in the Art Department of the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- 4 Working at the VSA in September, 1946 were Scott, Melvin, Amess, Binning, and Shadbolt. Others who were later in the 1940's to join the staff, and to contribute to the painting activities in Vancouver included Bruno and Molly Bobak, Takeo Tanabe, and Don Jarvis.
- 5 For a detailed study of the cultural resources of Vancouver in 1945, cf. The Junior League of Vancouver. The Arts and Our Town. (Vancouver: The Keystone Press for the Junior League of Vancouver, 1945-1946). This lengthy document, assembled by the members of the Junior League of Vancouver, was the first attempt made to assess the cultural facilities in Vancouver and to ascertain, from this material, what should be the priorities of the city in remedying the situation in order to enhance the growth of the arts in Vancouver.
 For a brief report of the changes implemented as a result of 'The Arts and Our Town', cf. Moira Sweeney. Community Arts for Vancouver. Artscanada XI (Winter, 1954), p. 62. The Community Arts Council (a direct result of the Junior League report) undertook a series of special projects. The first two were aimed at filling cultural gaps in the city's artistic life: the formation of the Friends of Chamber Music Society, and the Community Children's Theatre . . . Three other major projects followed: 'Arts and Our Town' held in November, 1948 (a month long presentation of plays and concerts); 'Design for Living', in November, 1949 (an exhibition of household arts, from architecture to furniture, which gave artists and craftsmen an opportunity to show their work, and which drew some fourteen thousand people in three weeks); and 'The First Symposium of Canadian Contemporary Music' held in May, 1950 . . . the only venture of its kind on record in this country (up to 1950). p. 62.

- 6 George Woodcock, "The Dotted Points of Light," Saturday Night, May, 1974, p. 24.
- 7 Smith, August 29, 1974. Smith noted that in the period 1946-1955, it was unrealistic to expect to be able to live on the proceeds of sales. One was considered successful to have sold three or four paintings per year at the time.
- 8 The exhibition of the British Columbia Society of Fine Arts was a private show, selected by the members themselves, with a few other artists being invited to participate. The Annual B.C. Artists exhibition was organized by the curatorial staff of the VAG. These shows, while comprehensive, were not large as the exhibition space at the VAG was, in the forties, limited to the five western galleries in the present building. All told, there were about three thousand square feet of exhibition space.
- 9 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 10 The lithographic presses were established by Smith in the Fall of 1950 following his return from San Francisco. Smith, February, 1977.
- 11 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 12 Very few of these works exist, most having been destroyed by the artist. There are a few silkscreen prints of the late 1940's in the artist's possession which are, in fact, close approximations of paintings done at the same time. The three etchings discussed in the following pages are the remaining works of the period 1946-1948.
- 13 Smith, July 19, 1974.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 The model for this etching was Smith's wife Marion. This work is one of the few occasions where Smith has treated the human figure as the subject matter of his work. Cf. Anthony Emery, "Artist in Perspective, Gordon Smith," Artscanada XXIII (July, 1966), p. 36.
- 16 In addition to having seen the School of Paris paintings at the 1939 San Francisco Golden Gate Exposition, Smith had, while taking painting from Shadbolt in 1945-1946,

attempted paintings which might be considered generically School of Paris. Shadbolt had studied in Paris with Andre Lhote in 1937, and there was a Lhote painting in the collection of the VAG. Smith, July 19, 1974.

- 17 Anthony Emery, "Artist in Perspective, Gordon Smith," op. cit. p. 37.
- 18 Of the works in this exhibition, only Two Totems, is extant, being in a private collection in Toronto. The remainder have been destroyed by the artist. The discussion of these works is based on the evidence of fairly old 35mm. slides which the artist has, as well as conversations.
- 19 Lighthouse, Father Point, oil on canvas, 42" x 50", 1930, coll: The National Gallery of Canada. Illustrated in: Peter Mellen, The Group of Seven. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), pp. 122-123.
Lawren Harris (1885 -) the theoretician of the Group of Seven, moved to Vancouver in 1940. He was soon active and influential at the VAG, being on the exhibition committee as well as the hanging committee. His opinion on the visual arts was sought after and respected. His house became a meeting place for the arts community, where Saturday evening 'soirees' were held. Gordon and Marion Smith were often invited to these evenings, at which they had an opportunity to see many of Harris' earlier as well as later paintings. Smith, August 19, 1974.
- 20 Smith went to Alert Bay on a sketching trip in the summer of 1947. Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 21 For an example of Shadbolt's work in the 1940's which treats social commentary, cf. Evening, Granville Street, in Jack Shadbolt. In Search of Form. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 79.
- 22 cf. Doris Shadbolt. Emily Carr (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1971).
- 23 Both Carr paintings are in the collection of the VAG. Zunoqua of the Cat Village, is illustrated in Doris Shadbolt, "Emily Carr," op. cit. p. 59.
- 24 cf. footnote 18 above.
- 25 Shadbolt had his students copy paintings of Cezanne. Smith, July, 19, 1974.

- 26 For an indepth study of painting in Canada in the 1930's, cf. Charles C. Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1975).
- 27 Smith's first house, built mostly by himself, was at 6162 Balaclava Street. Other artists who built houses at this time were Jack Shadbolt and Bruno and Molly Bobak. B.C. Binning, while teaching drawing at the VSA was deeply concerned with contemporary architecture, and built the first house in what was to be later termed 'west coast architecture.' This style of building was characterized by the use of glass, natural wood, and materials. cf. B.C. Binning, "Colour in Architecture," Artscanada (Summer, 1954), p. 4. Hubbard, in his article, "A Climate for the Arts," op. cit., mentions several of the young architects and their buildings in Vancouver.
- 28 Smith, July 10, 1974.
- 29 cf. Anthony Emery, "Gordon Smith and the Gesture of Painting," Artscanada, (Autumn, 1956), pp. 2-5.
- 30 Smith, August 19, 1974.
- 31 Smith, August 29, 1974.
- 32 Vancouver Art Gallery, Gordon Smith (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1976), p. 22.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Smith, August 29, 1974.

CHAPTER 5

VANCOUVER 1951 - 1955

The setting of Vancouver is romantic, if not to say sublime:

" . . . the natural setting of airy magnificence, the magic fertility of nature in the rain forest, the ever-present mountains forming a backdrop to everything one sees . . . The mountains are always near, and with them the wilds . . ." 1

Landscape always remained as a powerful influence for Smith, partly because of his father's early encouragement, to appreciate the landscape of his childhood, and Smith's own exposure to the tradition of nineteenth century British Landscape painters:

"Even when I've tried to get away from it, the landscape usually comes creeping back in . . . that when I have tried to keep my work non-figurative, either landscape, as I say, crept in, or the painting became 'contrived' and stilted and I destroyed it." 2

The return to an image after 1950, was also fostered by the lack of encouragement or, indeed, appreciation of the kind of painting he had learned about in San Francisco and had practised on his return to Vancouver. To understand this situation more fully, one should look at the VSA, the VAG and the prevalent cultural climate of Vancouver, not to mention Canada as a whole.

As noted previously, the Vancouver School of Art formed the focus of painting activities in Vancouver. It was the central place for the exchange of ideas and experiences for the artists teaching there, who formed 'a good proportion of the leading artists in Vancouver'.³ The senior artist teaching at the School who was concerned with contemporary idioms in painting, was Jack Shadbolt, at that time engaged in an expressive form of painting based on abstracted, but recognizable imagery

of seeds and pods. Expansion of Seed, 1949, is a typical example of the work he was doing at the time.⁴

An accomplished painter, a forceful and dynamic speaker, and an articulate writer, Shadbolt exerted a strong influence on the painting concerns of the VSA as a teaching institution.⁵ In 1951, he published a lengthy article in the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada Journal, entitled 'Recent British Columbia Paintings and the Contemporary Tradition'.⁶ In this article he expressed what he considered to be the commonly held beliefs of the artists in Vancouver:

"The starting (of a work) is the . . . abstract paraphrase of an intense nature mood." 7

"Assuming that he (the artist) is aware of the idiom of abstraction . . . To be aware of this idiomatic translation from nature to the present terms of our abstraction is what makes an artist philosophically valid for us and from then on his stature depends on his capacity to rehumanize this equation by moving back to nature through its (the idiomatic translations) formal restrictions . . ." 8

"It seems safe to suggest that the least successful attainments just now (1951) are those of the violent approach." 9

"There seems now to be a preponderant return to nature moods as the key area of experience through which one can get back into touch with reality." 10

The belief that advanced painting was most solidly founded on what might be termed the abstraction of natural forms, or the creation of abstract compositions whose genesis could be traced back to the impulse of Cubist compositions, was stated by Charles Comfort. In 1950, he addressed the Massey Commission (The Royal Commission on National Dev-

elopment in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences):

"By far the most stable expression in the visual arts today is emanating from the United Kingdom . . . the most eclectic and experimental from the United States . . . It would be of great value to Canadian painters and sculptors if a closer relationship were maintained with the United Kingdom and with France. Such a policy would be in keeping with those sympathies and loyalties which are part of our cultural heritage." 11

Comfort was in Vancouver for several months in early 1951, executing a mural for the Toronto Dominion Bank, situated on the northeast corner of Granville and Dunsmuir Streets.¹² At this point, Comfort had the opportunity to express his views to the members of the local art community.

The exhibition policy of The Vancouver Art Gallery also supported an interest in abstract, and particularly British abstract painting. From 1948 - 1954, the VAG mounted five major international exhibitions, of which three were of Contemporary British painters. The other two were an exhibition of Impressionist paintings, and a travelling exhibition of twentieth century European paintings from the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York.¹³

Of the three British exhibitions, the most significant was 21 Modern British Painters, jointly organized by the British Arts Council and The Vancouver Art Gallery. Included in this exhibition were works by Francis Bacon, Robert Colquhoun, Lucien Freud, Barbara Hepworth, Patrick Heron, Ivon Hitchens, Wyndham Lewis, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, John Piper, and Graham Sutherland. The paintings in this exhibition were for sale, and a special effort was made by the Gallery to purchase works from

the exhibition for the Permanent Collection.¹⁴

As a general observation, it appears that the knowledgeable artistic community in Vancouver at this time (the early 1950's) had its interests directed towards those developments in painting which were emanating from Great Britain, that is, a form of abstraction derived from the School of Paris. While artists in Vancouver were getting a first hand experience of British painting, their knowledge of contemporary art in New York, that art which was to become pre-eminent in the following years, was derived second hand from magazines such as LIFE, which ran articles on artists such as Jackson Pollock.¹⁵ When an opportunity for first hand experience of the American paintings they had read about was available, the reaction was muffled.

In January-February 1953, a major exhibition of contemporary American paintings was shown at the VAG. The exhibition, entitled 'American Vanguard for Paris', comprised twenty-five paintings by an equal number of artists including Pollock, Gorky, deKooning, Reinhardt, Hofmann, Motherwell, and Albers.¹⁶ The exhibition, first shown at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery immediately prior to its coming to the VAG, was shown in the centre gallery at The VAG for a little more than a week (January 31 - February 8, 1953). Whether or not the artists in Vancouver in general, saw the exhibition, is unknown. Certainly, the artists at the VSA saw the show. Smith remembers its impact very well.¹⁷ However, after the exhibition left Vancouver, there was no apparent visible reaction to it. The idea that British art remained the key force in contemporary painting stayed as the dominant idea, while the experiments of the contemporary American (New

York) painters were, in the commonly held opinion, 'a flash in the pan'.¹⁸

The combination of all these various factors - Smith's personal preference for painting based on an image; the lack of interest in large scale gestural, non-figurative painting; and the emphasis on the aesthetics of contemporary British painting - resulted in Smith's returning after 1951, to a style of painting closely related to the work he was doing prior to his trip to San Francisco. What separates the paintings of the early fifties from those of the late forties is the centrality which the act of painting assumes. While Smith again employed a recognizable image in his canvases, the freedom and excitement of the manipulation of the paint per se, which he had experienced in San Francisco, remained with him, and it developed in the early fifties as the central impulse of his work.

From 1951 onwards, Smith returned to the use of familiar subject matter, the landscape, but he now treated it as the starting off point for an exercise in painting, an exercise in which the act of painting and the accidents that happened in painting, determined the final outcome of the image. Five paintings have been chosen to trace the development of Smith's work, 1952-55 and the growing importance of the 'gesture of painting':¹⁹

BARE TREES	1952
WET NIGHT	1953
BURRARD BRIDGE	1954
ORCHARD	1954
STRUCTURE WITH RED SUN	1955

Bare Trees, 33" x 23", 1952 (figure 12) clearly identifies that aspect of painting with which Smith was concerned - the handling of an

image in a painterly fashion, which would also respect the two-dimensionality of the canvas. As an image, the sharp form of the pruned tree, against which one perceives the background, is closely related to the spikey forms of the British painter Graham Sutherland, an artist whose work had been widely exhibited in Vancouver:²⁰

"These (British) paintings were very influential, especially Graham Sutherland - on myself and others." 21

If one separates the image of the tree from the background, what is left is a close approximation of Smith's earlier Vertical Abstraction, 1950-51 (figure 11) now, in Bare Trees, the contours of the areas of colour have been softened and are less distinct.

By incorporating a rich handling of pigment with a recognizable subject matter, Smith, in Bare Trees, has also returned to the problem of the foreground and the background and to an awareness of the flat surface on which he is working. It is an attempt to have both an indication of depth, as implied by the 'overlapping' of the tree form with the background, and at the same time a recognition of the flatness of the 'space of the canvas', by painting each section of the canvas in such a way as to make one feel that the paint is as close to the viewer as possible.

In terms of the use of an image, a freer handling of paint, and an awareness of the two-dimensional nature of the canvas, Wet Night, 29½" x 33", 1953 (figure 13) is a more satisfactory treatment of these concerns than Bare Trees. While the 'tree' image remains, the number of trees has been increased and spread, as an interlocking pattern across

large areas of blues and greys. In working with larger areas of colour, Smith also emphasizes the brush work, which becomes more pronounced and freer than that in Wet Night.

In Burrard Bridge, 23½" x 33½", 1954 (figure 14) this process of loosening in both the structure of the image and the application of the paint, the beginning of which had been seen in Bare Trees, is taken further. Orchard, 29-3/4" x 33½", 1954 (figure 15) again extends this development in Smith's painting. This latter painting presents a major shift in Smith's palette, the predominant colours now becoming warm greens, browns, yellows and earth reds. While there is an emphasis on recognizeable subject matter, there is also a marked concentration on the free application of paint, most evident in the lower section of the painting, where the trunks of the trees merge with the background. The overall result is a feeling of spontaneity and 'swing', a sense of exuberance and expressiveness. In this work, the general loosening of overall structure is counter-balanced by the rich nature of the pigment. The subject matter has been used as a starting point from which Smith delves into the act of painting, without having a pre-conceived end.

This stage of Smith's painting culminates in Structure With Red Sun, 48" x 28", 1955 (figure 16). Against a background of freely painted rectangular shapes of various hues of ochre and blue, Smith has superimposed a network of sweeping arches, reminiscent of a grid pattern. In size and colour, as well as in the abstract patterning of the surface, this work falls within the stylistic boundaries of the British painters whose works were prominent at that time. In terms of the handling of the

paint and the lack of a prefigured composition, the work belongs with the kind of painting which Smith completed while in San Francisco and immediately afterwards, 1950-51.

A combination of British and American stylistic influences, Structure With Red Sun successfully copes with the problem of 'the space of the canvas'. The abstract patterning, a combination of flat spatial relationships, added to the complicated linear interlacings, emphasize the flatness of the canvas, while at the same time permitting an effective illusion of depth.

Structure With Red Sun, was well received at the First Biennial of Canadian Painting held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, May-June 1955. Jean-René Ostiguy, reviewing the exhibition wrote:

"Gordon Smith, the winner of the First Biennial Award, belongs to the best tradition of non-representational painters. His Structure With Red Sun evinces plastic qualities, shining with golden tones, reinforced with black ones. Curves and counter curves, horizontals and verticals, piled up in broad flat tints create an effective illusion of depth, in a way that has nothing to do with virtuosity and worn out recipes. In his painting, Gordon Smith reveals to us, with freshness and spontaneity, the feeling of the proud play of branches of the lofty British Columbia fir tree." 22

In alluding to the intimations of nature present in Smith's painting, Ostiguy touched upon a salient characteristic of Smith's work. This characteristic, central to Smith's painting, was further discussed by Anthony Emery, in an article about Smith, published in 1956:

"Gordon Smith stays close to the forms and colours of nature. He is, to borrow a useful phrase from Patrick Heron, an abstract-figurative, a painter whose work 'the abstract components add up to an oblique statement of landscape or still life without the reference being overt . . .'

While 'abstract-figurative' will serve as a convenient, if clumsy, label to indicate the form in Smith's painting, his method of handling the medium is closely allied to that of the expressionists. 'Such painters can loosely be described as expressionists in so far as they exploit the music of forms and colours to crystallize emotions and feelings, but they do not share the anxiety of the out-and-out expressionists to use art as a medium for expressing ideas. What really obsesses them is the gesture of painting itself'." 23

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 5

- 1 R.H. Hubbard, "A Climate for the Arts," op. cit. pp. 99 - 100.
- 2 Anthony Emery, "Artist in Perspective: Gordon Smith," Artscanada, XXIII (July, 1966), p. 36.
- 3 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit. p. 100.
- 4 Illustrated, plate 37, Jack Shadbolt, In Search of Form, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), p. 47.
"In Search of Form" is a lengthy discussion by Shadbolt of the fundamentals of his aesthetics.
- 5 Smith, August 19, 1974.
- 6 Jack L. Shadbolt, "Recent Paintings and the Contemporary Tradition," Royal Architecture Institute of Canada Journal, XXXIII (December, 1951), p. 376.
- 7 Ibid, p. 380.
- 8 Ibid, p. 377.
- 9 Ibid, p. 378. One would assume Shadbolt to be referring to the drip paintings of Pollock and the work of the New York Abstract Expressionists.
- 10 Ibid, p. 379.
- 11 Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 240.
- 12 Cf. Charles Comfort, "Mural In A Bank," Artscanada, IX (Autumn, 1951), p. 19.
- 13 "Exhibition of Contemporary British Drawings," 1948.
"21 Modern British Painters," 1951.
"Exhibition of Five Contemporary British Painters," 1952.
"French Impressionists," 1953.
"The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, A Selection From the Museum Collection," 1954.
- 14 Purchased for the Permanent Collection of The Vancouver Art Gallery were:

Robert Colquhoun	'Two Sisters' 48" x 36½", oil on canvas
Ivon Hitchens	'Moorland Pool' 19½" x 32½", oil on canvas
Wyndham Lewis	'Armada' 36" x 28", oil on canvas
Ben Nicholson	'Still Life' (Russian Ballet) 25½" x 16", oil on canvas

15 Smith, August 29, 1974.

16 There is no record of all the works in this exhibition. The American Federation of Arts "Catalogue of Travelling Exhibitions, 1952" reads as follows:

"American Vanguard for Paris No. 52-12

. . . It was organized by the Sidney Janis Gallery at the request of the Galerie de France, Paris, and was first shown in New York in January, 1952. The selection of twenty-five paintings by an equal number of artists was made by Leo Castelli and Sidney Janis. Among the leading avant-garde painters included are Baziotes, de Kooning, Matta, Gorky, Russell, Motherwell, Kline, Hofmann, Albers and MacIver."

This exhibition was reviewed by Palette (J. Delisle Parker), op. cit. See appendix A.

17 Smith, August 19, 1974.

18 Ibid.

19 Cf. Anthony Emery, "Gordon Smith and the Gesture of Painting," op. cit.

20 Corn and Stone (1945), 21" x 20½", chalk and gouache; Thorn and Wall (1946), 16" x 20", oil on canvas, were exhibited in "21 Modern British Painters", 1951. Cf. catalogue illustrations 34 and 35; British Council/The Vancouver Art Gallery. 21 Modern British Painters. An Exhibition Organized by The British Council in Conjunction with The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951. Vancouver, 1951.

21 Smith, quoted in "Gordon Smith," op. cit. p. 18.

22 Jean-Rene Ostiguy, "The First Biennial of Canadian," op. cit. p. 159.

23 Anthony Emery, "Gordon Smith and the Gesture of Painting," op. cit. p. 3.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 Portrait of Seaman Brown, 8-5/8" x 7-1/8",
1943, pencil drawing. (overleaf)



Figure 2 Portrait of Captain A.K. Guest,
8-9/16" x 5-7/8", 1943, pencil drawing.
(overleaf)

Leaffield-
Gibsons Hill

London S.W. 16.



Figure 3 Still Life, 4-7/16" x 7-7/8", 1942,
water colour. (overleaf)

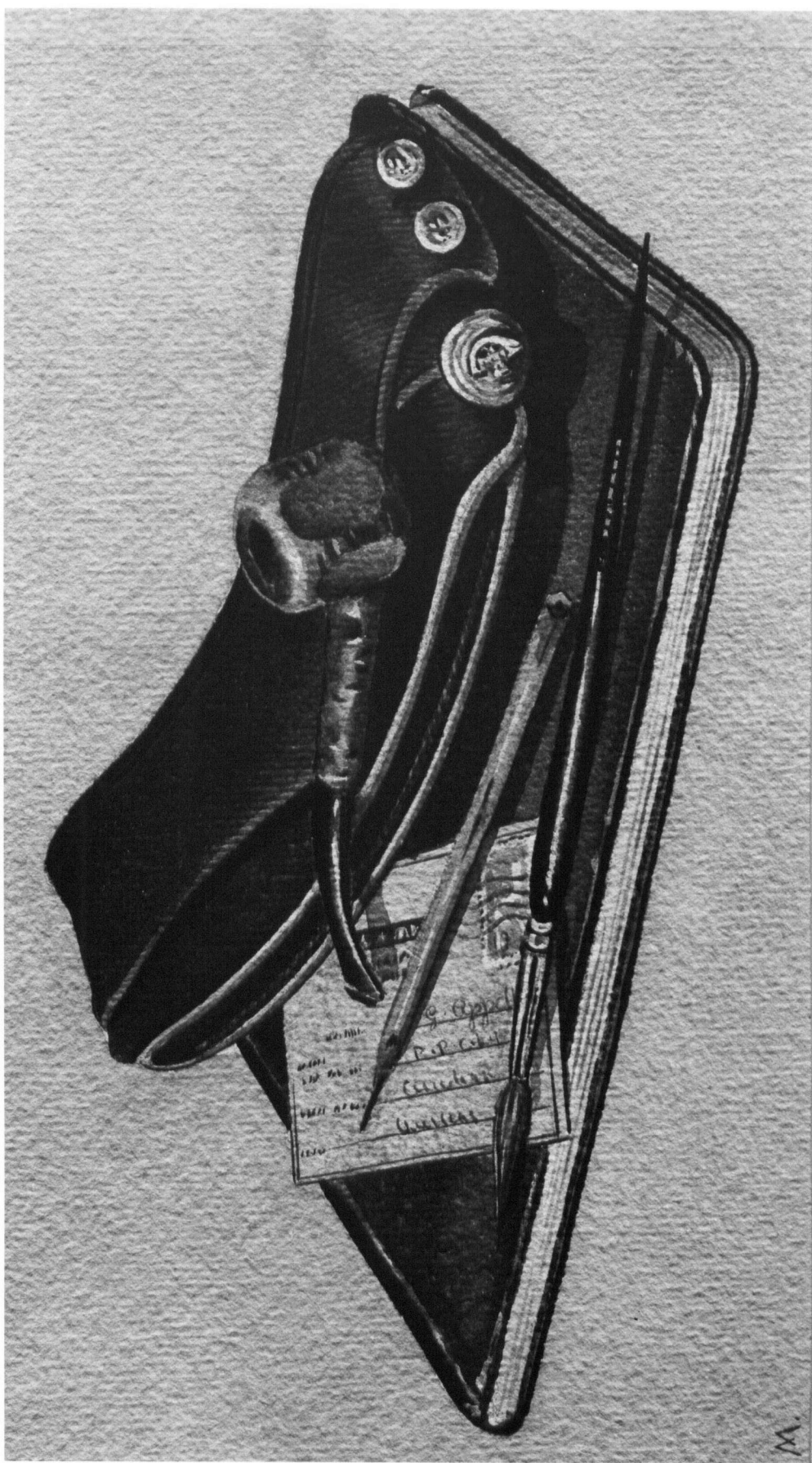


Figure 4 Quebec Barracks, Inverary, Scotland,
6-3/4" x 9-7/8", 1943, water colour.
(overleaf)



Figure 5 Point Atkinson, 5-11/16 x 7-3/8", 1946,
etching. (overleaf)

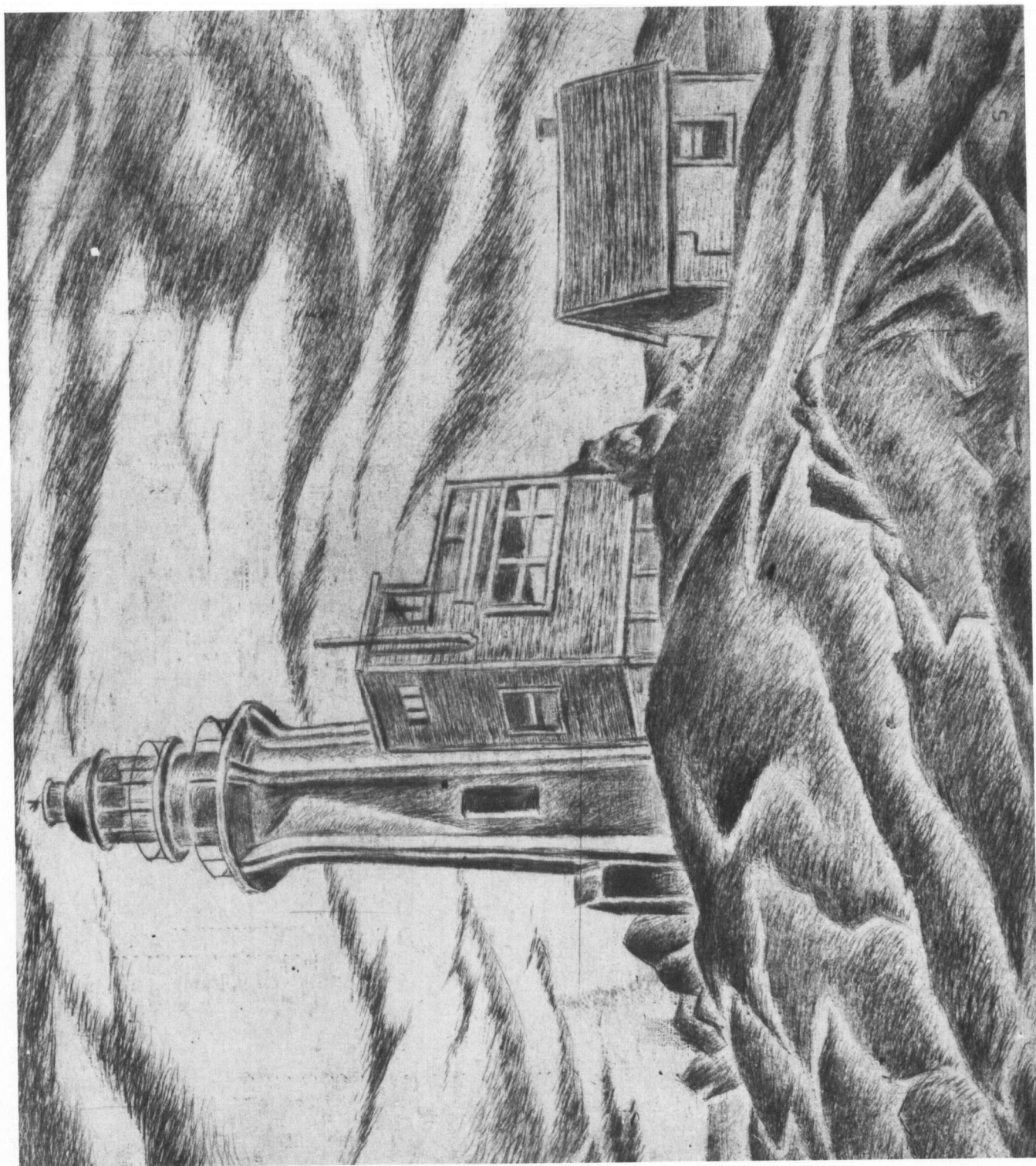


Figure 6 Study, 11-11/16" x 5-5/8", 1946/47,
etching. (overleaf)



Figure 7 Nature Forms, 10-9/16" x 6-3/4", 1947/48,
etching. (overleaf)



Figure 8 Installation photograph, 'Cafeteria
Exhibition', Vancouver School of Art,
Spring, 1948. (overleaf)



Figure 9 Still Life, 5¼" x 13½", 1948/49, oil on panel.
(overleaf)



Figure 10 Melon and Lemon, 41" x 23", 1949, oil on
canvas. (overleaf)



Figure 11 Vertical Abstraction, 59" x 29½", 1950/51,
oil on canvas. (overleaf)



Figure 12 Bare Trees, 33" x 23", 1952, oil on canvas.
(overleaf)



Figure 13 Wet Night, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 33", 1953, oil on canvas.
(overleaf)



Figure 14 Burrard Bridge, 23½" x 33½", 1954, oil on
canvas. (overleaf)

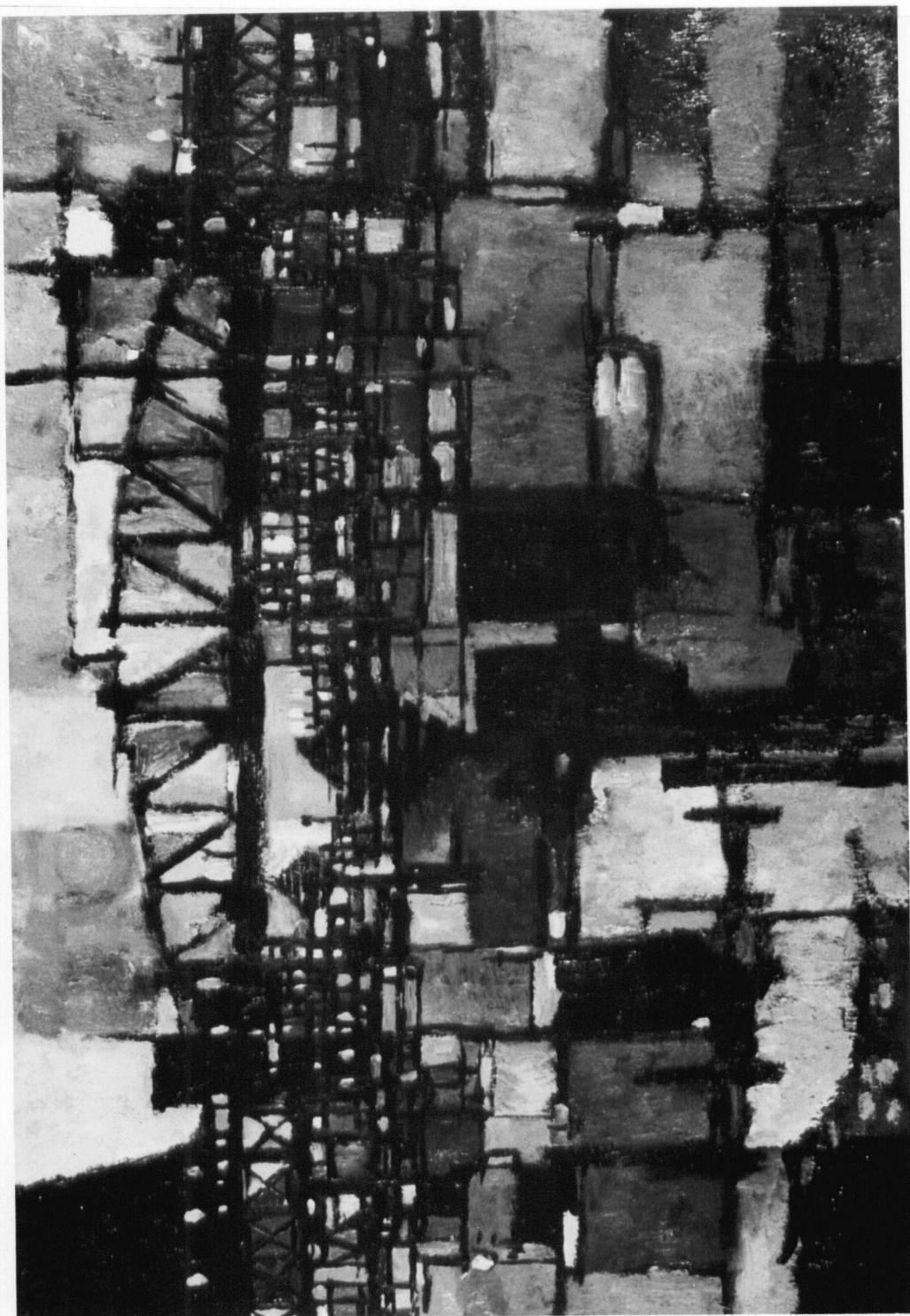
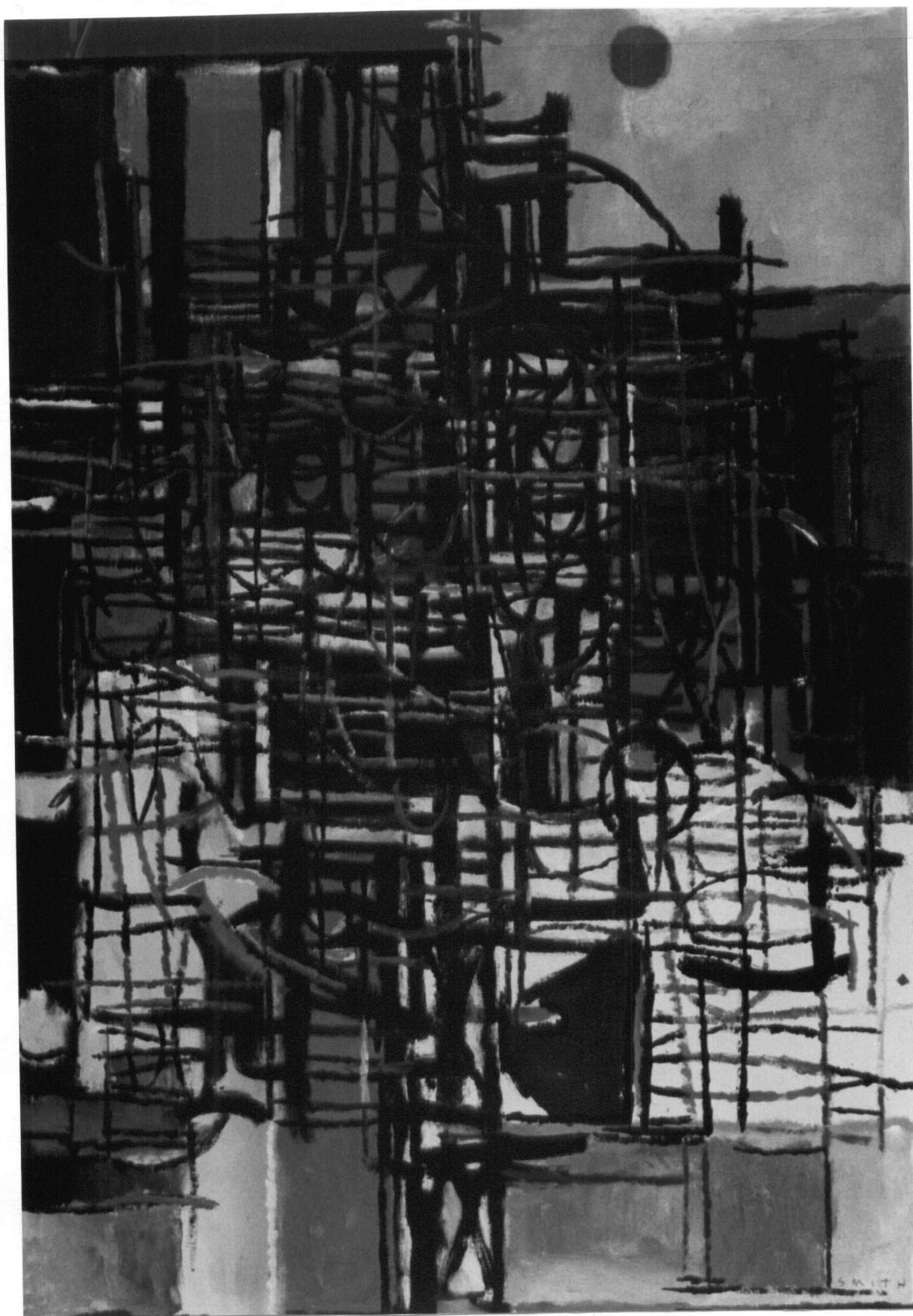


Figure 15 Orchard, 31½" x 35¼", 1954, oil on masonite.
(overleaf)



Figure 16 Structure With Red Sun, 40" x 28", 1955,
oil on canvas. (overleaf)



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)

APPENDIX A

Appendix A.

SHOW AT GALLERY, SENSATIONAL

By Palette

Vancouver has seen some strange and perplexing displays of "modern art" but these were chiefly mild affairs compared to the American Vanguard exhibition now at the Gallery.

This most sensational of Gallery shows, with its 25 large oil paintings by prominent American artists of extreme modern tendencies, was originally organized for display in Paris and is now being circulated on this continent by the American Federation of Arts. The exhibition will last until Feb. 8.

The collection was recently displayed at UBC art gallery, but the exhibits show to better advantage in the more spacious auditorium of the Gallery. Many of the pictures are strong to the point of violence in effect and need to be seen at a distance, thus enabling the visitor to understand better and appreciate each paintings as a whole.

In any case, those unprepared for extreme developments in paintings are apt to receive something of a shock on first entering the auditorium. It is well known how every departure from accepted art during the past century has met with opposition. Since the beginning of the present century these changes have come about rapidly and drastically in a manner unparalleled in history. The present exhibition reflects another, the latest, upheaval, that seems to be world-wide.

Naturally a show of this order presenting unfamiliar ways of presenting the artist's thoughts and emotions on canvas with practically total disregard of natural appearances, and doing so with a dynamic energy unseen before, is going to stir up considerable controversy.

It is no easy matter for the average observer to put aside preconceived notions and regard for traditional representational art. On the other hand it has been observed since opening of the gallery display, and also previously at the university, that quite a few people, particularly

among the younger generation, are much interested in this type of art, which will probably have pronounced influence on painting of the future.

In spite of the first sensational impact, to state that the main purpose of these painters was a sensational one is obviously incorrect, in view of their high professional standing and past record as serious artists.

Among exhibitors are names such as Jackson Pollack, Arshile Gorky, W. DeKooning, Adolph Gottlieb, G. Cavallon, J. Albers, A. Reinhardt, Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, A Matta and Mark Tobey of Seattle.

Their work varies considerably, with the uncompromisingly abstract predominating. Differing from great majority of exhibits of highly subjective nature are Lavey River's "Woman with Cat," with some fairly recognizable objects, and Gorky's "Table Landscape" and William Baziot's "Woman and Bird" with faint suggestion of derivation from nature.

Adolph Gottlieb's large abstract "Figuration of Clangor," in its harmony and balance of yellow and black with small black lines dancing here and there throughout the composition, holds well in the central place on the end wall. At its side is Albert Russell's long polychromatic fantasy, "The Orange Line."

These paintings of the Vanguard will no doubt appeal to many attending the midday concerts at the Gallery. The music and the abstract paintings seem to go together remarkably well.

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