

A Concise History of
**CANADIAN
PAINTING**



Third Edition
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top of the CN Tower in September 1995, and another show at l'Alliance Française in September–October 1996. It wasn't a lot of exposure, but it kept him going, and when you did encounter a Pachter painting in Toronto in the nineties it was inevitably a memorable experience.

ALLAN HARDING MACKAY (b.1944) has also turned part of his life to work other than his art during long periods, but has nonetheless managed to contribute substantially to painting in Canada. Born in Charlottetown, P.E.I., he studied painting and art education at the Nova Scotia College of Art, graduating in 1967. His career turned towards curatorial work almost immediately when he became assistant curator at the new Centennial Art Gallery in Halifax. He obviously had a talent in this direction and in 1970 he became the director/curator of the Anna Leonowens Gallery at NSCAD. He left that to become the founding director of the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge in 1975, and four years later moved to the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon as director/curator. He left that position in 1983 in order to rejoin his Swiss-born wife and young daughter in Switzerland (they had separated in Lethbridge), and lived in Hämlismatt, with a studio in Bern, for the next five years. It was an opportunity to return to painting, and he embraced it enthusiastically, working in pastel, chalks, and oil on big sheets of paper, producing landscapes inspired by the work of the great Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler as well as self-portraits, sometimes in company with portraits of Hodler. He kept in touch with Canada while away and began showing this new work back home in March 1985, in a visual and sound installation at Mercer Union in Toronto, followed by a similar installation at Eye Level Gallery in Halifax in June. Then in the spring of 1986 he had a show at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum in Charlottetown: *Five Families*, featuring six large paintings (each 1.5 × 3.5 metres, roughly) in his now highly developed realist, yet expressive, style of mixed-media painting on heavy paper, all portrait studies of the wives and children of him and four of his high-school buddies. Another exhibition, *Variations on Hodler*, was shown that year at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff, at the University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery in Vancouver, and a smaller version at the Edmonton Art Gallery. Then in December 1986 he had his first solo exhibition with a Canadian dealer, Toronto's Grunwald Gallery. He showed there again in March 1988 (it was Grunwald & Watterson then), just as news broke that he was returning to Canada, this time to Toronto.

MacKay had been named director of Art Metropole, to begin in May 1988, a position he held for a year. He then became the director of The Power Plant, where he served until 1992. In March 1993 he travelled to Somalia as an official war artist, then beginning in February 1994 served as project manager of the blockbuster exhibition of masterpieces from the Barnes Foundation at the Art Gallery of Ontario. He left Toronto the following year to become director of the Laurentian University Museum and Art Centre in Sudbury, Ont. He had only two commercial exhibitions following his return to Canada—at Grunwald Gallery in November 1989 and at Genereux Gallery, also in Toronto, in 1995—but presented innovative, highly stimulating installations at a range of public institutions across the country throughout the decade.

This began in February 1989 with virtually simultaneous exhibitions in Halifax and Ottawa. *Some Critical Countenances: An Extended Drawing* opened on the ninth at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Although described as a drawing, the work on display was a mix of chalk pastel and oil on heavy paper, his preferred medium in Switzerland

where it was largely created (1986–8), and it was huge, 1.5×170 metres, essentially creating an enclosing environment. Its subject is the human face of the Canadian art world, a grand compendium of 134 portraits of prominent artists, critics, historians, curators, directors, teachers, collectors, administrators, and politicians. Each of the large faces has been examined closely, in some cases from multiple points of view, but the focus is the essential personality, and MacKay knows every one of them well. The experience of the whole is extremely intense, particularly if you are one of the subjects and also know most of the others personally, as I can attest. On the other hand, the sheer virtuosity of this painting performance also, I am sure, speaks eloquently and movingly to those in its audience who are not party to the personalities of this insiders' world.

The Ottawa exhibition, which opened at the Ottawa School of Art on the fourteenth, was titled *Source/Derivations*. It was a carefully considered installation that was effectively an investigation of how we come to understand and interpret a critical icon of our visual culture, in this case Tom Thomson's *Northern River* of 1915 (NGC). Most prominent in the display was a huge, very long painting of MacKay's on heavy paper, *Point of Origins*, a complex landscape based on various combinations of the composition of *Northern River*. Then there were two large portraits, one of myself and the other of Charles Hill, curator of Canadian historical art at the NGC. Standing on white pedestals in the room were a waxed facsimile of the NGC curatorial file on *Northern River*, a waxed copy of the first (1973) edition of my *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, and a waxed colour postcard of the source painting. MacKay undertook a similarly complex investigation of the source of one of his paintings in *Source/Derivations II*, held at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at Hart House, University of Toronto, in January 1992, where Lawren Harris's *Isolation Peak*, c.1930 (HH), was the interrogated work. *Source/Derivations III* at the Art Gallery of Windsor early in 1994 had as its source the manipulated photographic work by London, Ont., artist Ron Benner (b.1949), *As Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, of 1975–6 (AGO). The following year a cast of Rodin's *Balzac* acquired by the Edmonton Art Gallery was the focus of *Source/Derivations IV* at that institution, and in March–April 1997 it was Edwin Holgate's 1938 painting *Head* at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ont. The last of the decade, *Source/Derivations VI* in 1998, was at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and had the work of W.J. Phillips as the source. While not all of these address paintings, those that did celebrated the vitality of the medium and its capacity to speak directly to human needs over time, a message that invariably was delivered by MacKay with consummate skill and his inevitable touch of wit.

The art of ROBERT HOULE (b.1947) has also been informed by his extensive curatorial experience, although much more, arguably, by his cultural background. Born in St. Boniface, Man., of Anishnabe parents, he was instructed in Catholic doctrine at a native residential school, but also raised in traditional beliefs by his grandparents on weekend visits. Houle studied art history at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, receiving his BA in 1972, then went on to McGill University in Montreal where he first pursued his art history further in a pre-master's program (1972–3), then switched to the bachelor of education program, graduating in 1975 with a specialization in art education. He moved to Ottawa in 1977 to become the curator of contemporary Indian art at the National Museum of Man, a position he held for three years. Houle had begun showing his own art immediately following his graduation, with his first solo exhibition at Galerie André-George in Montreal in 1976. He first showed in Toronto in the summer