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## BOOKS

# CANADIAN PAINTERS COME OF AGE

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Canada.

IT has long seemed strange to me that New Zealand knows so little about Canada. Some of us know a good deal about the United States and hardly any of us know nothing. We see U.S. newspapers, read U.S. books, listen to U.S. radio programmes, and have at least a rough general knowledge of the course of U.S. politics. But of Canada most of us know so little, and are content to know so little, that our ignorance probably seems deliberate to Canadians and almost suspicious. If Canadians care. But I am not sure that they do. I asked a very distinguished Canadian once why Canadians took so little interest in the Pacific and Australians and New Zealanders so little interest in Canada, but he did not even bother to answer. He was not at all offended, but gave me the kind of smile you turn on a man who has asked a deliberately rhetorical question that you would spoil if you even pretended to

answer it. That was in the early stages of the war, and since that time hundreds of New Zealanders have learnt to fly in Canada, found a second home there, and returned full of praise for the Canadian landscape and full of gratitude for the warmth of Canadian hospitality.

I find it, therefore, more than ordinarily interesting that the Phaidon Press has devoted a whole volume to Canadian painters, and is going to give them a second volume. This volume, however, is complete in itself, and I can easily believe that it is the first book on Canadian painting with plates large enough and faithful enough to "give the right impression of this particular and singular art." Particular and singular it certainly is to us here in New Zealand now that it has found its own Canadian way of seeing things; but art began in Canada as it began here, with imitation, and took just about a hundred years to find its own eyes. There were first the wanderers from Europe, competent in all ways of Europe, Germans and Dutchmen who did coloured engravings and lithographs of the new world for sale to the old world. Then there were Englishmen who had been to Paris, or Canadians who had been converted into Englishmen or Frenchmen by the academic traditions of the schools. It was not till they were well into this century that Canadians really came to themselves, and the awakening was not easy. It is no doubt true of them still that many of them carry on English or Continental traditions and see their own country through the eyes of people brought up under different skies. But this volume is not much concerned with those. Its purpose is to show what artists were doing in Canada before the nationalist awakening (roughly throughout the 19th Century and into the first quarter of the 20th) and what they have been doing since; though the most recent tendencies (from about 1930 to the present day) are reserved for a second volume.

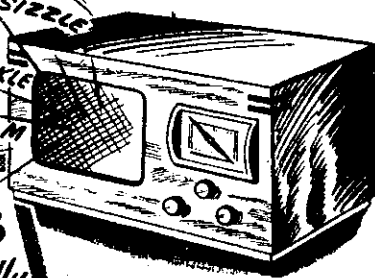
I think the first impression of most New Zealanders who turn these pages will be that the Canada of its own painters is not very much like the Canada of legend or of tourist literature. One reason of course is that artists are not less but more influenced by the dramatic things of nature than ordinary people are, and in Canada have gone to the wilderness to look both for themselves and for the original and abiding things in their own country. So it is not prairies we get here but mountains, not limitless wheatfields but rocks and frozen lakes—everything but the things most of us mean when we say Canada. In Canada, of course, as here, most artists have to do other things to live; teach or do commercial work, but especially teach; and teaching means long vacations and an inclination as well as the opportunity at intervals to go wild. It does not seem to be quite true that Canadian artists first found themselves in the wilderness; but three or four of the most stimulating and provocative men in the nationalist awakening found themselves there, and now their landscape painting at least is pure Canadian.

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