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Abstract

Biennials, both historically and in the present, form a significant part of the contemporary art world. However, beyond simply acting as platforms for contemporary art, these extensive, recurring international exhibitions also facilitate complex dialogues involving a variety of agents, both cultural and political. With the inherently political nature of these exhibitions in mind, this thesis examines Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials from 1951 to 1958. By examining what I identify as the triple purpose of the biennial - the exhibition of contemporary art, the facilitation of cultural diplomacy, and the creation and reinforcement of cultural nationalist narratives - this paper further explicates the National Gallery of Canada’s role in defining Canadian culture and the relationships between visual culture, cultural nationalism, cultural diplomacy and institutional politics in the postwar era.

Drawing upon Judith Balfe’s conception of the utilization and manipulation of visual culture for nationalistic or diplomatic ends, I argue that participation in the Venice Biennale served as a means of reinforcing the presence of an NGC-defined culture of Canadian art to an international audience comprised mainly of artistic and diplomatic elite. Conversely, participation in the São Paulo Bienal served primarily as a conduit for the Department of External Affairs to project a positive image of Canadian culture to other nations and foster cordial relations between like-minded nations. I contend that a comparative analysis of Canadian participation in the two biennials highlights the complicated relationship between the NGC and the Department of External Affairs as well as the ideological adherence of both institutions towards liberalism and liberal democracy.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Biennials currently saturate the contemporary art world. These extensive, recurring international exhibitions have spread far beyond their Venetian origins, becoming, as Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvestbø argue, some of the most prominent and significant venues for the dissemination of contemporary art.¹ Beyond simply acting as platforms for contemporary art, biennials also facilitate complex dialogues between a variety of agents, both cultural and political. Bruce Altshuler recognizes this rich contextual framework, arguing that biennials function “...in various ways within larger systems of artistic practice, markets and commercial relations, local and national economic development and political activity of various kinds.”² Caroline A. Jones also addresses the political ramifications of these contemporary art exhibitions, succinctly characterizing biennials as “politics by other means.”³

Recognizing the inherently political nature of such art events as biennials, in this thesis I examine Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Bienal under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) from 1951 to 1958. By examining what I identify as the triple purpose of the biennial – the exhibition of contemporary art, the facilitation of cultural diplomacy, and the creation and reinforcement of cultural nationalist narratives - I argue that Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials provides a framework for examining the complicated relationships between visual art, cultural nationalism, and cultural

diplomacy in the postwar era. While the NGC participated in international biennials under the pretence of projecting Canadian fine art abroad – a goal informed by the 1951 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (also known as the Massey Commission) – such activity was inextricably linked to the promotion of the NGC and its definition of Canadian art. The NGC’s agenda was both complicated and reinforced by the Department of External Affairs’ interest in international biennials as a conduit for cultural diplomacy. Thus, beyond legitimating the NGC’s definitions of Canadian contemporary art, its early forays into biennial culture were also attempts to align Canadian art with “international” (better defined as Western) trends in contemporary art and to reinforce the connection of Canadian culture and society to Western interests and values in the increasingly ideologically polarized climate of the Cold War.

Drawing upon Judith Higgins Balfe’s conception of the utilization and manipulation of visual culture for nationalistic or diplomatic ends, I argue that Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale was a means of reinforcing the presence of a NGC-defined culture of Canadian art to an international audience comprised mainly of artistic and diplomatic elites. Conversely, participation in the São Paulo Bienal served primarily as a conduit for the Department of External Affairs to project a positive image of Canadian culture to other nations and foster cordial relations between like-minded nations. While, outwardly, the two biennial-style exhibitions had similar goals, I argue that, in the context of Canadian participation therein, they ultimately served highly disparate purposes and highlight the tensions inherent in the goal to project Canadian culture abroad. I contend that a comparative analysis of Canadian participation in the two biennials highlights the complicated relationship between the NGC and the Department of External Affairs as well as the ideological proclivity of both agencies for liberalism and liberal democracy.
The post-WWII era is an exceptionally important period in the history of Canadian art and culture. Amid growing concerns for Canadian cultural survival in the face of exponential expansion of U.S.-based mass culture industries and a corresponding lack of appreciation for and knowledge of Canadian culture both domestically and abroad, the postwar years saw a concerted effort on the part of the federal government and the Canadian cultural elite to foster a Canadian culture that was both nationally and internationally vibrant. From these efforts arose, among other things, the Massey Commission which articulated the cultural nationalist rationale for strengthening institutions and organizations such as the NGC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the National Film Board (NFB), and for the creation of a new council to support the arts and scholarship in the humanities and social sciences -- the Canada Council. Beyond fostering its notion of vibrant culture within Canada’s borders, the Massey Commission also furnished the pretext for an increased international presence of Canadian culture. Zoe Druick argues that, “although the Massey commissioners were largely ambivalent about the mass media,…they were subject…to a Cold War pressure to align Canadian arts with the objectives of the UN's cultural wing, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).” The values of UNESCO, she points out, included such standard liberal tenets as diplomacy, dialogue, and open cultural exchange. Her emphasis on the connection between postwar cultural nationalism and internationalism provides significant context to Canadian biennial participation in the 1950s. It is in this context that I couch the beginnings of Canadian participation in biennials, drawing upon Druick’s argument that the cultivation of Canadian

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5 Ibid.
culture was not only a nationalist project “but was also seen to be the basis of membership in an international cultural community.”

The Venice Biennale was founded in 1895. It emerged from a Committee that wished to emulate the major 19th century expositions, particularly the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, as a means of promoting local economic development through an international art exhibition. Its earlier manifestations were, as argued by Lawrence Alloway and Sandra Paikowsky, salon-like exhibitions that glorified the canon of European art. These first five Biennales consisted of the works of Italian and other European artists, all exhibited within one main pavilion. The first individual national pavilion was constructed by Belgium in 1907, after which the Biennale strongly encouraged other countries to follow suit. During this initial phase, Canada’s only presence at the Biennale was through individual appearances by James Wilson Morrice in 1903 and 1905. The Biennale went on hiatus from 1914 to 1920 due to the First World War. Shortly after its reestablishment, the fascist regime in Italy assumed progressively more control of the exhibition, causing several countries to abstain from participating. After another hiatus from 1944 to 1946, the Biennale returned in 1948 under the leadership of Giovanni Ponti and Rodolfo Pallucchini, who assumed the roles of Head Commissioner and Head Secretary, respectively, and who demonstrated a strong commitment to liberal democratic ideologies and international cultural exchange.

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6 Ibid.  
9 Moreno, 8-9.  
10 Paikowsky, 131.
During this time, highly aware of its own low profile abroad and of the broad international audience of the Venice Biennale, Canada first participated in the exhibition in 1952 under the auspices of the NGC after an extended period of correspondence between the NGC, the Department of External Affairs, and the organizers of the Biennale. In contrast, the NGC participated in the first São Paulo Bienal only at the insistence of the Department of External Affairs. As I discuss at length in Chapter 3, the São Paulo Bienal, modeled explicitly after its Venetian counterpart, began in 1951. It was designed to emphasize Brazil’s status as a modern, industrialized, independent nation that adhered to liberal democratic ideologies and encouraged international cultural exchange.11

Within this broader history, this thesis focuses on biennial participation in the 1950s by selecting two key points during the decade. In Chapter 3 I discuss the first instances of Canadian participation in the São Paulo and Venice biennials in 1951 and 1952, respectively. In Chapter 4 I focus on Canada’s participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale and the construction of the Canadian pavilion in comparison to its presence at the 1957 São Paulo Bienal. Beyond being the first decade of consistent Canadian participation in international biennials, the 1950s saw the greatest enthusiasm on the part of the NGC for the Venice Biennale – an enthusiasm that emerged from, and dovetailed with, the emphasis on cultural nationalism spurred by the Massey Commission. The decade, culminating in the creation of the Canadian Pavilion on the Biennale grounds, was marked by mounting enthusiasm on the part of the NGC for the Venice Biennale – institutional interest that stands in opposition to the NGC’s relative ambivalence towards the São Paulo Bienal. In contrast, Canadian participation in the São Paulo Bienal was driven largely by the

Department of External Affairs, which I argue, saw the exhibition as a potential venue for cultural diplomacy with Latin America. After the 1958 Venice Biennale, there was a marked shift in how the NGC perceived the utility of biennial participation. By the late 1960s, Jean Sutherland Boggs, then Director of the NGC, repeatedly expressed doubt that biennial participation was even remotely useful to the NGC, even though the Gallery still opted to contribute to international biennials for decades thereafter.  

This period (1951-1958) of Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials warrants deeper examination for several key reasons. It is an excellent case study of the intersection of nationalism and internationalism in the goals of the Massey Commission, while also highlighting the vagueness and multiple interpretations of the Massey Commission’s goal to “[project] Canada abroad.” It underlines the central role played by the NGC in the postwar period as the arbiter of Canadian art and of the ways in which the NGC strove to maintain this role. Additionally, it emphasizes the difficult relationship between the NGC and the Department of External Affairs in regards to the projection of Canadian culture. Finally, and more broadly, it highlights the significance and influence of liberalism and the values of the liberal cultural elite to major streams of Canadian cultural activity in the postwar era.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo Biennials

Canadian participation in both the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Bienal is, at present, neglected in the field of Canadian art history. Few scholars have explored the history behind Canadian representations at these events, particularly in the case of São Paulo where no scholarly works have been published as of the writing of this thesis. There is, however, a small body of scholarly works that address Canadian participation in Venice: Carol Reesor’s 1995 Master’s thesis, entitled “The Chronicles of the National Gallery at the Venice Biennale”; a 1999 *Journal of Canadian Art History* article by Sandra Paikowsky, entitled “Constructing an Identity: The 1952 XXVI Biennale di Venezia and ‘The Projection of Canada Abroad’”; Michelangelo Sabatino’s 2007 article, “A Wigwam in Venice: the National Gallery of Canada Builds a Pavilion, 1954-1958”; a 2010 *University of Toronto Faculty of Information Quarterly* article by Valentine Moreno, entitled “Venice Biennale and the Canada Pavilion: Politics of Representation in the Gardens of Art” and, most recently, Josée Drouin-Brisebois’ essay, “An Unexpected Meeting Through Time and Space: A Conversation between BBPR and Steven Shearer,” which was included in the Canadian exhibition catalogue at the 2011 Venice Biennale.

Reesor presents a thoroughly researched chronological account of NGC participation in the Venice Biennale from 1952 until 1986, the last year in which Canadian participation in the Biennale was supervised by the NGC.\(^\text{14}\) She dissects the events and exchanges surrounding each

\(^{14}\) The NGC controlled Canadian representations at the Venice Biennale until 1986. From 1988 to 2009, Canadian representation was determined by peer review through a committee of curators who selected from

Paikowsky’s 1999 article, “Constructing Identity: The 1952 Biennale di Venezia and ‘The Projection of Canada Abroad,’” is the sole scholarly article (of which I am aware) that presents an in-depth account of Canadian participation in a single Biennale. Consequently, her account of the 1952 Venice Biennale was highly influential to my own analysis. Couching her narrative in the wake of the Massey Commission, Paikowsky presents an analysis of the concerns of the cultural elite regarding the projection of Canadian culture and art in Europe, asserting that the Biennale functioned as a “visual manifestation of the aims of the Massey Commission.”

Paikowsky also pays special attention to the artists selected by the NGC for the Biennale (Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts, and Alfred Pellan), characterizing the chosen artists, especially Carr, as relatively conservative choices. In turn, she argues that the NGC was more concerned with highlighting a carefully constructed canon of national art, as opposed to the achievements of individual artists:

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proposals submitted by curators from institutions across the country. The selected institution assumed curatorial and financial responsibility for the pavilion that year. However, the inconsistent nature of this decentralized model, in combination with the 2009 withdrawal of financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (formerly the Department of External Affairs) led to the National Gallery reassuming responsibility for Canadian representation at Venice in 2011.


The rather conservative nature of the exhibition...reflects the National Gallery’s definition of a circumscribed national artistic identity for foreign consumption. There was no attempt to present work that stood outside the evolutionary mainstream of Canadian art – a mainstream that had, in fact, been largely determined by the National Gallery. If the Canadian presence at the Biennale was envisioned as an enactment of the Massey Commission’s mandate for a ‘projection of Canada abroad,’ then the National Gallery certainly did foster a singular harmonious image of Canada.  

Paikowsky’s emphases on the constructed nature of the canon of Canadian art and the NGC’s near hegemonic control thereof are significant. Interestingly, in spite of the Massey Commission’s emphasis on the cultivation and encouragement of a vibrant Canadian culture, Paikowsky also emphasizes the NGC’s propensity to draw attention to the British and French influences on Canadian art – a tendency which I also noticed in my own research and discuss at length in Chapters 3 and 4.  

Sabatino, Drouin-Brisebois and Moreno have written the few studies that offer a history of the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Taken together, the three provide a description of a contextual base for the construction of the pavilion, including the ideological motivations of both the NGC and the Italian architecture firm commissioned to create the building -- Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti, and Rogers (hereafter BBPR) -- as well as an overview of the issues that have faced the managers of the Canadian Pavilion since its opening. The construction of the Canadian Pavilion was a long-awaited goal of the NGC which, in the years before its construction, had frequently lamented the location of the Canadian exhibition in the Palazzo dell’Esposizione alongside other pavilion-less countries. Completed by the time of the 1958 Venice Biennale, the Canadian Pavilion was constructed on a $25,000 CDN budget, including the

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17 Ibid., 154-155.
18 Ibid., 138.
19 For a more thorough discussion of the Canadian Pavilion, please refer to Chapter 4.
architect’s fee. The spiral-shaped building is constructed around a large tree and is comprised of brick, steel, glass, and wood. Since its construction, the pavilion has been criticized extensively for its unconventional exhibition space, which does not lend itself well to the exhibition of large artworks or installations.

While Drouin-Brisebois’ essay ultimately links to the Steven Shearer exhibition she curated for the 2011 Biennale, Drouin-Brisebois also contextualizes the ideologies of BBPR and the construction of the Pavilion in postwar Italian architecture, arguing that BBPR’s conception of the pavilion was driven by a desire to create a modest seasonal structure that corresponded with their philosophies about bridging the Modern with the vernacular. In doing so, the pavilion can be seen as a reaction to the monumental and imperialist impulses the architecture associated with Mussolini’s Fascism and to the surrounding neo-classical pavilions: British (1909), French (1912), and German (1909; rebuilt in 1938 under Hitler’s orders).

Drouin-Brisebois draws attention as well to the similarities between the Canadian Pavilion and other BBPR structures, including its 1933 House for Married Couple, which also possesses what Drouin-Brisebois describes as an “organic aesthetic.” Her suggestion that the Pavilion’s design was part of a broader movement in 20th century Italian architecture informs my argument that the NGC was so absorbed in the notion of having a pavilion (any pavilion) on the Biennale grounds, that it largely relinquished editorial control to BBPR. Interestingly, Drouin-Brisebois opted to glaze over the largely ambivalent response of Canadian critics to the pavilion in the years following its construction.

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23 Ibid., 73.
following its opening, focusing instead on the unusual design of the structure, and mentioning only briefly that it was thought better suited to the exhibition of relatively small paintings, drawings or sculptures than to large pieces.24

In contrast to Drouin-Brisebois’ essay, Sabatino’s article is devoted entirely to the Canadian Pavilion and features a more pronounced focus on the motivations of the NGC for constructing a pavilion, emphasizing the NGC’s aspirations to increase its public presence, both domestically and internationally. Sabatino includes a valuable discussion of the historical context of the pavilion’s construction, drawing particular attention to the impact of the Massey Commission on the atmosphere of cultural nationalism in the 1950s.25 However, as evinced by his title choice, “A Wigwam in Venice: The National Gallery of Canada Builds a Pavilion,” Sabatino’s analysis uncritically places indigenous cultures at the service of Canadian cultural nationalism. He suggests that the design of the pavilion resembles both a nautilus shell and a wigwam.26 In spite of his admission that “there is no documentary evidence to suggest that the architects were prompted by their Canadian patrons to adopt or reinforce the wigwam model, or that they had ever visited Native-Indian communities in Canada and the United States,” he continually draws comparisons between the pavilion and a wigwam, suggesting that a wigwam could serve, both historically and in the present, as a unique symbol of Canadian nationalism.27 His sole justification for making the wigwam comparison is provided by Lawrence Alloway who, in his 1969 book, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl*, wrote, “Canada has built an intricate wigwam of glass and wood around a tree, presumably to symbolize love of

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24 Ibid., 78.
26 Ibid., 8.
27 Ibid., 3.
nature. In truth, perhaps all the pavilions are, to some extent, folkloric.”

Further, Sabatino situates the wigwam and the indigenous communities that used such structures in a temporally vague past, suggesting that the wigwam-resembling pavilion “evoked a timeless, preindustrial vernacular source.”

As I have mentioned, Drouin-Brisebois also emphasizes the “vernacular” qualities of the pavilion, but instead she suggests that this tendency emerged from the preferences and philosophies of the architects. She also draws attention to the unusual design of the pavilion and speculates about its inspiration, suggesting,

In light of BBPR’s interest in continuity, they incorporated modernist geometric form and transparency, which they blended with an organic shape inspired by the nautilus shell and, as has been suggested, by the Native American dwelling the wigwam. (One could argue that their choice of the wigwam as one of the many sources of inspiration was the result of their awareness that the pavilion’s site in the Giardini and its relationship to Canada.)

She makes clear as well that the wigwam comparisons are speculative but does not offer an explanation as to where the association originated. My own research indicates that the NGC believed that the pavilion was inspired by “the shell of Archimedes”; however, I have found no archival evidence to suggest that the NGC believed that the pavilion was based on a wigwam.

In her 2010 article, “Venice Biennale and the Canadian Pavilion: Politics of Representation in the Garden of Art,” Moreno suggests that the Canadian pavilion has served “as a meaningful encounter point between Canada and international art – a window through which Canada shows

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29 Sabatino, 10.
30 Drouin-Brisebois, 78.
to the world its national artistic and curatorial practices.” Moreno provides a brief but clear overview of the significance of the Canadian Pavilion in the Biennale, which she uses to contextualize the current problems facing the caretakers of the pavilion. In historicizing the Biennale, Moreno highlights the links between cultural dominance and political power, emphasizing that countries such as Germany, Great Britain, and France, which were among the first to “colonize” the Giardini and build national pavilions, have historically been among the world’s leading imperial powers. Moreno uses the pavilion to draw attention to the complex relationship between Canada’s intense desire to foster an independent identity and its prior status as a colony with sustained ideological loyalty to Britain. While the construction of the Canadian Pavilion symbolically reinforced Canada’s independent status both culturally and politically, the Pavilion’s location near the British, German, and French pavilions, as well as its small size relative to its monumental neighbours, symbolically implies Canada’s sustained relationship to its colonial past.

While scholarship dealing with Canadian participation at the Venice Biennale is limited, there exists substantive secondary literature that contextually and conceptually provides a more comprehensive secondary research base for this thesis. I have divided this secondary literature into three categories: studies of postwar Canadian culture that place particular emphasis on the Massey Commission and its intellectual underpinnings; works focused on international biennial culture, specifically publications that consider biennial-style exhibitions as complex, multi-layered arenas for both cultural and diplomatic exchanges; and studies that consider the

32 Moreno, 6.
33 Ibid., 9.
34 Ibid., 13.
ideological ramifications of exhibiting art, focusing on works that examine the power dynamics inherent in exhibiting and claiming knowledge of a national culture.

Post-War Canadian Culture

Liberalism, the Cultural Elite, and the Massey Commission

Ian McKay’s “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History” is somewhat of an outlier among studies of postwar Canadian culture and the Massey Commission; nonetheless, it provides an intellectual context for the work of many other Canadian cultural historians that is useful as a starting point for my discussion. McKay argues that the history and development of what he calls the “category” of Canada should be “analyzed through the study of implantation and expansion over a heterogeneous terrain of a certain politico-economic logic – to wit, liberalism.” McKay argues that this “liberal order framework” and its accompanying assumptions, thus, can be used to trace the entrenchment and normalization of “social formations and territories that ultimately cohered…into the dominion of Canada.”

Although McKay’s article cannot be labeled as cultural history in the same way as most of the other works I discuss -- and his chosen temporal scope (late 19th and early 20th centuries) entirely precedes my own -- his thesis regarding the significance of liberalism to the conceptual development of Canada as a nation provides valuable context to the works of such scholars as Zoe Druick, Len Kuffert, Paul Litt, and Philip Massolin. Each of these scholars couch key events

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36 Ibid., 624.
37 Ibid., 641.
in postwar Canadian cultural history, such as the Massey Commission, in the intellectual proclivities of a Canadian cultural elite that strongly believed in the value and significance of liberal democracy. My intent here is not to suggest that McKay’s definition of liberalism is synonymous with the brand of liberal democracy touted by the cultural elite during the postwar period. What I am asserting, rather, is that McKay’s emphasis on the significance of liberalism to the formation of the Canadian nation and its gradual entrenchment and normalization in the Canadian national psyche both contextualizes and reinforces the intellectual tendencies of the postwar cultural elite.

The cultural elite and its belief in liberal democracy figures significantly in the work of Kuffert, Litt, and Massolin all of whom identify this group and its beliefs as one of the driving forces behind the development of postwar Canadian culture. For example, in A Great Duty, Kuffert examines the intellectual origins of Canadian cultural policy from WWII onwards, largely by analyzing the tendencies and preferences of what he identifies as the “critics” – an amorphous, broadly-defined group of educated individuals belonging to the intelligentsia. 38 Kuffert’s definition of the group is not necessarily based on profession, but rather on a specific set of attitudes regarding modern life and mass culture, and the perceived threat these two posed to the development of national culture. 39 He argues that the critics were convinced that modern life and mass culture lulled Canadians into complacency, consequently discouraging them from engaging with the kind of (high) culture that the critics deemed appropriate to a Canadian national culture. The critics justified this concern by suggesting that the uniformity and homogeneity created by mass culture were akin to propaganda and totalitarianism – a concern that dovetailed nicely with

39 Ibid., 15.
the threats to liberal democracy presented initially by WWII and later by the Cold War.\textsuperscript{40} Subsequently, Kuffert argues, the critics wished to enforce their own definition of culture over middle-(Anglo) Canadians as a means of cultivating taste, identity and active citizenship.\textsuperscript{41}

Significantly, Kuffert identifies the paradoxical nature of the critics’ desires to enforce their definition of national culture on the broader population in the name of “democracy.” As Kuffert demonstrates, the critics, too, were keenly aware of this inherent contradiction. However, in spite of it, Kuffert maintains that the critics were also genuinely concerned about what they perceived to be the direction in which Canadian cultural life was headed without their intervention: “Suffused with despair and clearly biased towards autonomous thought, liberal education, and the accumulated wisdom of the West, critical dismissals of mass culture and prescriptions for ‘re-humanizing’ modern life were genuine.”\textsuperscript{42} Kuffert applies his analysis of these intellectual trends to a number of cultural phenomena that occurred in the mid-twentieth century, including the Massey Commission, demonstrating that many of the aforementioned concerns manifested themselves in the activity surrounding the Commission and in its resulting report.

A more substantial account of the Massey Commission, as well as of the Commission’s origins, key figures, ideologies and outcomes is provided in Paul Litt’s 1992 book, \textit{The Muses, The Masses, and the Massey Commission}. Litt’s definition of the critics is largely similar to Kuffert’s, though he focuses predominately on those elites who actually participated in the Massey Commission. Significantly, by discussing a handful of specific individuals at length, Litt provides explicit links between key players in the Commission – such as Vincent Massey – and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 18-19.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 173.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 137.
\end{itemize}
the staff of the NGC, pointing out that Massey was both a longtime member and recent chair to the Gallery’s Board of Trustees. During the NGC’s presentation to the Commission, Massey temporarily stepped down as Chair, but this, as Litt asserts, “only underlined the fact that the NGC [had] friends in high places.”\(^4\) This connection allows me to contextualize the attitudes and activities of the NGC within the broader concern for high culture and liberal democracy illustrated by Litt and Kuffert.

In focusing his energies exclusively on the Massey Commission, Litt ultimately provides a more comprehensive analysis of the critics’ ideological underpinnings than Kuffert, although he covers a broader temporal scope. Like Kuffert, Litt discusses the cultural elite’s fear of the demise of Canadian culture, as well as a democratically-engaged Canadian citizenry, due to the influx of American mass culture and the push to foster a vibrant national culture. However, Litt provides a more marked breakdown of this ideology, dividing his analysis into two sections, one devoted to discussion of liberal humanism, the other to liberal humanist nationalism. Litt, like McKay, is careful to distance his definition of liberal from anything partisan. He recognizes that the critics did not believe in individual liberty to the point where the free market reigned and Canadians could partake in whatever leisure pursuits (i.e. American mass culture) capitalism provided. For this reason, Litt dubs the brand of liberalism touted by the cultural elite as liberal humanism. The ability to critically partake in the arts, letters, and sciences was viewed as a means of cultivating taste, identity, and active citizenship, and the Massey Commission situated high culture both as the solution to modernity and mass culture and a necessary condition for liberal democracy.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Ibid., 103.
Litt extends this discussion to liberal humanist nationalism in his admission that the cultural elite knew that it had a difficult task ahead in attempting to convince Canadians to opt for high cultural pursuits in lieu of mass culture. As a means of leveraging support for their cause, the critics situated American mass culture as an explicit threat to Canadian nationalism which they insisted was best cultivated through high culture. Litt’s highlights this theoretical sleight-of-hand by arguing that liberal humanism requited cultural nationalism’s desire for identity with a set of moral values and aesthetic standards that were coherent enough to serve as a basis for national unity and distinct enough from those of American mass culture to provide a unique Canadian identity...Massey perceived this preservation of this unique Canadian cultural identity to be the paramount concern of the commission’s work.\(^{45}\)

This emphasis on cultural nationalism, Litt continues, was particularly potent in the immediate postwar era given Canada’s newly established status as a “middle power.” Now that the country enjoyed slightly more political and economic prominence, and a higher quality of life than ever before, it was felt by the critics that national culture ought to “mature” as well.\(^{46}\)

Massolin’s *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* provides a characterization of the critics largely akin to Kuffert’s and Litt’s. Massolin creates the image of a group of cultural elite who felt deeply concerned for the future of Canadian culture and the Canadian citizenry. However, Massolin adheres to a most restrictive definition of the cultural elite, and thus his emphases differ slightly from Kuffert’s and Litt’s. He discusses the cultural elite from the perspective of its adherence to Toryism, or what Massolin considers to be a tendency towards conservatism tied partially to the British Loyalist tradition.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 108.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 109.
suggestion that the critics shared ties to British Toryism further underscores Kuffert and Litt’s assertion that the ideologies of the cultural elite were not partisan-based, but rather rooted in a particular set of attitudes towards culture and modern life.

Massolin also emphasizes the cultural elite’s tendency toward what he calls “anti-modernism,” arguing that they believed that modern society “was commodified, materialistic, and entailed a pecuniary culture concerned with ‘having’ and acquiring rather than ‘being’ and the development of an awareness of a spiritual or philosophical existence.”48 However, in spite of its suspicion towards modernity and modern life, Massolin also asserts that the cultural elite could be accepting of mass media technologies, such as television or film, if it encouraged the consumption of their definition of culture.49 Indeed, as Druick asserts, many critics were prompted to feel ambivalent towards certain mass cultural technologies, such as film, given UNESCO’s tendency to support the broad dissemination of information.50

Intersection of Postwar Nationalism and Internationalism

One significant way in which both Massolin’s and Druick’s analyses aided my research was their consideration of the impact of international relations on cultural policy and the critics’ desire to not only foster and define Canadian culture, but also to project this nascent national culture internationally. Massolin, for example, draws attention to Canada’s newly relative prominence on the international scene after WWII and the impact this had on the insecurity felt by critics

48 Ibid., 9.
49 Ibid., 173-174.
regarding the lack of a recognizable culture. However, it is Druick’s article, “International Cultural Relations as a Factor in Postwar Canadian Cultural Policy,” that provides the most comprehensive statement on the subject. Identifying a lack of international contextualization in previous studies of the Massey Commission, Druick argues that the Commission’s values aligned very closely with those of UNESCO and allowed the Commission to express the nation’s adherence to Western values of cultural exchange, diplomacy, and liberal democracy in the ideologically polarized atmosphere of the early Cold War. As Druick asserts, this ideological alignment demonstrates that the postwar cultivation of Canadian culture was not only a nationalist project, but was also an attempt to integrate Canada into an international cultural community and dialogue.

Similarly, at the conclusion of Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission, Maria Tippett asserts that in the years surrounding the Massey Commission there existed among the cultural elite the steadily strengthening conviction that art and culture had an important role to play in international affairs. The use to which they had been put during both wars had already demonstrated the strength of the belief that they could help maintain and project ‘civilized’ values in terms of international crisis, and after 1945 Western governments particularly developed a strong attachment to the idea that they could be used in the fostering of habits, outlook and life-patterns those governments preferred. UNESCO was created partly in the service of this idea, and, in time, individual nations introduced their own programs…to aid in the attainment of this goal.

Analyses such Druick’s and Tippett’s support and contextualize my assertion that the NGC’s early forays into the Venice and São Paulo biennials constituted attempts to align Canadian art

51 Ibid., 155.
53 Maria Tippett, Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 181.
with “international” (better defined as Western) trends in visual art and, by extension, reinforce the connection of Canadian culture and society to Western interests in the ideologically polarized climate of the Cold War.

Beyond the field of cultural history, communications theorist Evan Potter highlights the increased importance placed on cultural diplomacy in the post-war period. In his book, *Branding Canada*, he, like the other scholars discussed above, argues that the Massey Commission’s lament regarding the lack of knowledge of Canadian culture on an international level led to roughly two decades marked by an emphasis on the development of Canadian cultural industries such as the National Film Board and the Canada Council. Potter continues by asserting that, nonetheless, attempts to project Canadian culture abroad were not particularly cohesive, nor were they part of a broader government plan – an assertion that is reflected in my own analysis of Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials.\(^{54}\)

Additionally, Sean Rushton’s chapter in Potter’s book suggests that part of the cause of this lack of cohesiveness lies in the vagueness of the Massey Report itself. Rushton notes that, while the Report recommended the projection of Canadian culture abroad, “it said very little regarding the specific ways in which culture might be put to use in serving Canada’s foreign policy agendas, although it did emphasize the use of ‘highbrow’ culture.”\(^{55}\) Rushton continues by asserting that many working with the Department of External Affairs, or as foreign diplomats, frequently complained about the lack of cohesive international cultural strategy, which they claimed resulted in various agencies repeating each others’ duties while neglecting other tasks.


and issues. This lack of cohesiveness aids in contextualizing the frequent miscommunications and competing agendas between the NGC and the Department of External Affairs in the development and execution of biennial exhibitions. Indeed, both Rushton’s and Potter’s arguments regarding the vagueness of the Massey Commission contextualized and reinforced my own findings on the multiple interpretations of “projecting Canada abroad” at the Venice and São Paulo biennials. In spite of his discussion of the vagueness of public diplomacy efforts, Rushton notes that in the immediate postwar era, Canada increased its distribution of “cultural materials” to the U.S., Europe, and South America, specifically mentioning the efforts of the CBC, NFB, and the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission. 56 While both Rushton and Potter neglect to note Canadian biennial participation in their analyses, I contend that it fits nicely into the contextual framework they provide.

**International Biennial Culture**

While there is a lack of attention given to biennial participation in the literature dealing with post-war Canadian culture, there is a growing body of scholarship that examines, and critically reflects upon, the broader history and structure of biennial culture. I paid particular attention to texts that consider biennial-style exhibitions as complex, multi-layered arenas for both cultural and diplomatic exchanges. Several works from two recently published collections – *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* and *Starting from Venice: Studies on the Biennale* – were particularly influential in the development of my research. Considering these works in tandem with the literature on post-war Canadian culture

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56 Ibid., 85.
allows me to analyze what the NGC and the Department of External Affairs intended to achieve, both politically and ideologically, by participating in the Venice and São Paulo biennials.

Of the studies included in these two collections, key to this thesis is Caroline A. Jones’ “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” which was published in both The Biennial Reader and Starting from Venice. Jones convincingly historicizes the phenomenon of “biennial culture” – a phrase she has been credited with coining – in exposition phenomenon of the 19th century. By extension, she argues that, “many of the features of those earlier world pictures are replicated or implied in the present…among them: presumptive universality, goals of knowledge production, ties to tourism…and new geopolitical ambitions.”57 In making a link between 20th century biennials and 19th century expositions and their blatant political and ideological agendas, Jones prompts a consideration of the power structures present in subsequent moments of biennial culture. In the case of this thesis, Jones’ argument can be applied to postwar Canadian biennial participation insomuch as it allowed the NGC, and the country more broadly, to engage in a dialogue with other, more powerful participants in both the political and art worlds, and to align itself with Western interests and ideologies. Jones effectively characterizes biennials as “politics by other means…In this respect, biennials are no different than sporting competitions and diplomatic exchanges that sublimate military desires.”58

While Bruce Altshuler generally supports Jones’ claim that biennials descended from 19th century expositions, his essay, “Exhibition History and the Biennale,” also extends her argument in both scope and impact. Ultimately, he characterizes biennials as frameworks for the broader interaction of various political, economic and cultural networks. Altshuler links the desire of

58 Ibid., 77.
municipalities to reinforce themselves as major centres of culture through participation in 19th century expositions to the development of the nation-state based organization of the Venice Biennale. He goes on to argue that Venice opted to develop a biennial-style exhibition to assert its cultural status and align itself with the then-current trend of organizing international exhibitions. This desire for internationalism, he argues, led to the Biennale’s nation-based organizational structure: “eventually, with the episodic construction of national pavilions beginning in 1907, the representation of and competition among national cultures assumed a concrete architectural form that actively structured the Biennale experience.”59 Altshuler’s argument highlights how international biennials became sites for creating and reinforcing national cultures and identities. His suggestion that nationalism was entrenched in the history of biennial culture contextualizes Canada’s desire to project a national cultural identity at both the Venice and São Paulo biennials.

Additionally, Altshuler posits that biennials also descended from Parisian Salons, both in terms of the Salons’ intention to report on then-contemporary artistic trends as well as their status as key sites for the canonization of particular artists and artworks.60 Given this dual contextualization, it follows that the exhibition of art in a biennial context is an attempt on the part of the exhibitor to influence the contemporary constitution of the art historical canon, and by extension, to express both cultural and political power. Donald Preziosi summarizes this impulse most cogently in The Biennial Reader by suggesting, “In the most basic terms, ‘art history’ is a mode of staging and envisioning thought – about nations, individuals, ethnicities, races, genders, and classes, on behalf of social agendas or political desires projective of that other dimension of

60 Ibid., 20-21.
While Preziosi’s essay, “The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary,” primarily addresses the 1851 Great Exposition, his characterization of art history as a site for the construction and reinforcement of dominant narratives and power structures is highly relevant to this thesis. Ultimately, such analyses of biennial culture make clear that biennials function as stages for not only cultural authority, but also political power.

It is generally acknowledged that international biennials, like any art exhibition, need to be read as complex systems that, as Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvestbø argue, place a “frame around the artwork – geopolitical, institutional, discursive, and spatial – [that] is never neutral, but instead administers readings and interpretations.” However, there remains some debate about whether manifestations of biennial culture have successfully transcended the museum’s ideologies and power structures, or whether, as advocated by Moreno, biennial culture replicates some of the museum’s key assumptions. In “The Unstable Institution,” on the one hand, Carlos Basualdo argues that equating an international biennial and a traditional museum leads to the incorrect assumption that the ideological frameworks of the two institutions are identical. He suggests that museums are intrinsically Western institutions, whereas the global nature of international biennials can both challenge and subvert the contemporary canon. On the other hand, in “The Global White Cube,” Filipovic directly challenges Basualdo’s arguments. He suggests that Basualdo’s assertion ignores the fact that biennials cannot challenge Western notions of art while ultimately maintaining the frame of the Western museum. As evinced by her

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article’s title, Filipovic characterizes the biennial as the “global white cube,” and argues that many biennials “overwhelmingly show artworks in specially constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometrics, white partitions, and windowless spaces of classical exhibitions.” In describing the international biennial as the “global white cube,” Filipovic also highlights what she calls the “underlying fiction” of the white cube and its tendency to imply that both the space and the work presented within is without agenda or ideology. This claim adds nuance to Jones’ suggestion that international biennials serve as “politics by other means.” Thus, in addition to possessing a political dimension, it could be argued that biennials operate politically under the guise of the brand of universality advanced by the white cube.

As I mention while discussing Moreno’s article, I am inclined to agree with Filipovic that, in the case of Venice and São Paulo during the postwar era, international biennials bear some striking similarities to the modern museum. However, my intent is not to suggest that museums and biennials are synonymous. Nor is my intent to make a sweeping statement regarding biennial culture as a whole – a task whose breadth situates it far beyond the scope of this thesis. The ephemeral nature of biennial culture, as well as its overt emphasis on the contemporary, or the new, distinguishes it in many ways from the traditional art museum. However, the power structures inherent in exhibiting and claiming knowledge about art and the creation of an accompanying canonical narrative within the museum cannot be ignored in the study of biennial culture. This is especially true in these early examples of Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo Biennials, given the insistently sustained involvement of the NGC. Additionally, a consideration of the ideological overlap between the conventional museum and

65 Ibid., 324.
the biennial allows for an examination of the analyses of scholars such as Judith Balfe, Brian Wallis and Tony Bennett who discuss exhibitions that occur within permanent institutions, as opposed to an international biennial, but whose work is still highly relevant to this thesis.

The Ideological Ramifications of Exhibiting Visual Culture

The works of Judith Higgins Balfe, Brian Wallis and Tony Bennett are each key to my consideration of the ability of biennial exhibitions to communicate cultural and political power. While none of these scholars examine biennial culture specifically, they all consider how art exhibitions have been used to constitute and reinforce specific nationalist narratives or identities or to influence political discourse.

Bennett and Wallis both suggest, albeit in different ways, that visual culture, and the exhibition thereof, not only reinforces specific knowledges and narratives, but actually aids in their constitution. In *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*, Bennett focuses largely on critically historicizing the museum as an institution and deconstructing its informing ideologies and social impacts – subject matter that is distinct from mid-20th century international biennials. However, in his introductory chapter, Bennett provides a conceptual framework for the communication of knowledge within the museum that is applicable to other exhibition contexts, including international biennials. Bennett highlights the connections between the historical and ideological underpinnings of the museum and the rise of liberalism and self-governance in the 19th century, thus prompting consideration of how the museum can impart certain narratives and
foster certain behaviors in its viewers. In describing the creation of social narratives within the museum, Bennett suggests:

Instead of looking through the mechanisms that are produced when particular forms of knowledge and expertise are translated into practical, technical and institutionalized forms to decipher the modes of power that lie behind them, the perspective of governmentality typically looks at those mechanisms, focusing on their mundane details and particularities to identify how particular forms of power are constituted there, within those mechanisms, rather than outside or behind them.

Within the context of postwar Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials, Bennett’s work provides a framework for my assertion that both the NGC and External Affairs attempted to reinforce and constitute certain narratives about Canadian culture. Put simply, the NGC strove to locate Canada more prominently in the Western art world, especially in the Venice Biennale, and External Affairs attempted to assert Canada’s status as a cultural middle power with similarities to, and positive relationships with, other Western powers.

Wallis also makes strong arguments about the ability of visual culture, and the exhibition thereof, to constitute new narratives and new ways of knowing, couching his contentions in the creation of nationalist narratives within festival-style exhibitions. He posits that visual culture and representations of visual culture are a powerful means of creating and reinforcing images of nation, both to those residing within and to those outside of the nation in question:

Visual representations are a key element in symbolizing and sustaining national communal bonds. Such representations are not just reactive (that is, depictions of an existing state of being), they are also purposefully creative and they can generate new political and social formations.

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67 Ibid., 5.
Consideration of the creation of nationalist narratives within exhibitions of visual art is particularly useful to this thesis given the nation-based organizational structures of the Venice and São Paulo biennials during the postwar era. In this context, Wallis’ arguments can be applied to Canadian biennial participation by suggesting that the NGC and External Affairs were not only projecting Canadian culture abroad, but were also attempting to create the nation’s status as a culturally sophisticated middle power.

Also of particular importance to this thesis is Judith Higgins Balfe’s seminal article, “Artworks as Symbols in International Politics.” Using several examples specific to the U.S., Balfe discusses how, under the guise of the ability of visual art to evoke “universal understanding,” art exhibitions have been organized and executed for primarily diplomatic purposes. To demonstrate this argument, Balfe proposed to examine four variables for each art exhibition in question: first, she looked for any obvious political agenda on the part of the state sponsoring the exhibition; second, she examined whether the aesthetics of the chosen artworks communicated any message specific to the exhibition’s political agenda; third, she analyzed the qualities and characteristics of the exhibition’s intended audience (i.e., the “elite or mass” quality of the audience); and fourth, she examined the critical and popular response to the exhibition.69

While my methodology differs from Balfe’s in several key ways, I utilize her criteria as a starting point for my analysis of the Venice and São Paulo biennials insomuch as I consider the political or cultural agendas of the NGC and the External Affairs, the selection of artists, the relatively elite audience of the Venice and São Paulo biennials, and the reaction of the NGC and External Affairs to the success, or lack thereof, of the selected biennial showings.

One of Balfe’s most relevant discussions to this thesis was her analysis of exhibitions sent both to and from the U.S. in the immediate postwar era. Balfe highlights that immediately after WWII, a number of exhibitions of the European Old Masters were sent to museums around the U.S., all of which were met with an enthusiastic local response and overall success. These exhibitions, Balfe contends, served as evidence of the unity of mankind and the triumph of Western civilization over economic, political, and military conflicts and competition. As such, these exhibitions of blockbuster proportions legitimated the formal organization of the wartime Allies under NATO, and the founding of the United Nations. Granted such evident successes, it is not surprising that art was increasingly thought capable in some small but vital measure of healing the residual bitterness and the wounds of war.\(^{70}\)

Similarly, Balfe also mentions that the U.S. had previously sent works of modern art to various Latin American locations in a bid to bolster claims that American, and by extension Western culture fostered artistic expression.\(^{71}\) These examples provide context for my contention that Canadian participation (on the parts of both the NGC and External Affairs) served as a means of reasserting Canada’s adherence to liberal values and open cultural exchange in the ideologically polarized climate of the Cold War. It is with this contextual framework in mind that I examine Canadian participation in the 1951 São Paulo Bienal and the 1952 Venice Biennale in the following chapter.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 198.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 200-201.
Chapter 3

São Paulo Bienal, 1951 and Venice Biennale, 1952

The promotion abroad of a knowledge of Canada is not a luxury but an obligation, and a more generous policy in this field would have important results, both concrete and intangible.

Royal Commission on the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, 1951

The statement above from the Massey Commission report is indicative of at least part of what both the NGC and External Affairs hoped to achieve at the Venice and São Paulo biennials, respectively. However, the statement’s vagueness, and indeed the vagueness of the report’s recommendations generally, meant that while both parties attempted to project Canadian culture abroad, their two agendas manifested themselves in very different ways. I contend that External Affairs saw the São Paulo Bienal as a way to improve diplomatic relations with Latin America, while also encouraging any growing ideological tendencies there towards liberalism and the West. Conversely, the NGC utilized the Venice Biennale as a method of reaffirming the Gallery’s central role in the Canadian art world while projecting an NGC-specific image of Canadian art with the goal to advance Canada into the international art world. In the rest of this chapter, I further explicate Canadian participation in the 1951 São Paulo and the 1952 Venice biennials. I begin by contextualizing the endeavour in the ideological climate of the Massey Commission as a means of highlighting the political and cultural concerns occupying the Canadian cultural elite in the postwar period. I then discuss Canadian participation in the 1951 São Paulo Bienal and the 1952 Venice Biennale through an examination of the intentions of the Department of External

Affairs and the National Gallery. I analyze the curatorial programme and, briefly, the responses of both parties to the effectiveness and value of participation in each biennial. I contend that a comparative analysis of Canadian participation in the two biennials highlights the complicated relationship between the NGC and External Affairs and, by extension, sheds light on the different ways in which they conceived the utility and ideal manifestation of cultural diplomacy and the international projection of Canadian culture.

The Massey Commission

A discussion of the first instances of Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials would not be complete without first discussing the Massey Commission and its 1951 report. Given the report’s articulation of the liberal values that permeated many of Canada’s cultural institutions, and its significant impact on the cultural nationalist rationale for institutions such as the NGC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and the National Film Board (NFB), it provides context for the cultural history of the entire postwar era. Further, its immediate proximity to the 1951 São Paulo and 1952 Venice biennials makes the report particularly relevant to discussion of these two international exhibitions.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Massey Commission report was the culmination of a two-year project devoted to encouraging a better understanding of the state of the arts, letters, and sciences in Canada. The resulting report largely presented the cultural elite’s concern about the ills of modernity, an oversaturation of mass culture imported largely from the U.S., and a subsequent lack of popular engagement with high cultural ideals. Conveniently, the cultural elite conflated its notions of high culture with Canadian national culture, as well as with the survival of liberal democracy. As Litt asserts, the recent end of WWII and the beginning of
the Cold War had a significant impact on the report’s manifestation of these concerns. As he puts it,

The Cold War had a profound yet paradoxical effect on the ideology of the culture lobby. Its liberalism was particularly conscientious because the Cold War heightened its awareness of the need to define and protect the values of Western liberal democracy. At the same time a theoretical attachment to liberal economic principles prevented most members of the culture lobby from offering any fundamental criticism of the capitalist system which had created the cultural conditions they abhorred.  

Litt goes on to suggest that the Cold War ultimately provided a large part of the justification for the Massey Commission’s call for increased government intervention into the arts, letters, and sciences. I contend that concerns about the ideologically polarized atmosphere of the Cold War also manifested themselves in Canadian biennial representation, as the NGC and External Affairs both, albeit in different ways, used the exhibitions to align Canada’s with liberal democratic values and the values of other Western nations.

Indeed, the report reflects these concerns, opening with passages that emphasize the importance of cultural engagement to healthy national life, underscoring the significance of a well-rounded liberal education to creating an engaged, active citizenry. The report is very careful to reassure the reader that the Commissioners do not wish to force Canadians to partake in high culture. However, it maintains that encouraging Canadians to choose high culture over other, less suitable, leisure pursuits is acceptable as the cultural “appetite grows by eating.” I interpret this section of the report partially as an attempt to furnish a pretext for later sections in the report that justify the central role of cultural institutions such as the NGC. Being a distributor of fine art to

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74 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 5.
Canadians across the country is easily supportable if it is assumed that the culture “appetite” will grow with increased exposure.

The report continues by arguing that “our [Canada’s] economic stature and political maturity are not in themselves enough; that these must be matched by progress in another field [i.e. culture].” It is determined that the inundation of U.S. mass culture is at least partially to blame for the dearth of a vibrant national culture in Canada. The report does not present any specific solution to this problem, but rather continues by lauding various Canadian cultural institutions and by continuing to urge sustained domestic engagement with, as well as the international projection of, high culture. A later section of the report specifically praises the NGC’s collection of Canadian art, its execution of international exhibitions, as well as its extensive domestic exhibition extension program. “Much of [the NGC’s] important work goes on outside the building, and far from Ottawa,” the report states, adding,

It was mentioned earlier that the original function of this national institution was to encourage Canadian interest in the fine arts. It operates therefore not only in Ottawa but throughout the country, and to see its work as a whole one must leave the capital and visit the local galleries in the provinces.

As I mention above, these sections discussing the NGC are posited as justification of the Gallery’s central role within the Canadian art world as well as its role as a major provider of basic art education to Canadians. While the quotation above focuses on its educative role on the domestic level specifically, earlier passages also laud its international exhibitions of Canadian art.

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75 Ibid., 9.
76 Ibid., 22.
77 Ibid., 81.
78 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 79.
It is worth reiterating here that Massey was a member of the NGC’s Board of Trustees. While he stepped down as Chair during the NGC’s presentation to the Commission, this act ultimately reinforced the fact that the NGC was highly connected to the cultural elites who spearheaded the Massey Commission.\textsuperscript{79} The NGC was clearly pleased with its treatment in the Commission’s report. In the May 22, 1952 meeting of the NGC Board of Trustees, it was noted that the NGC’s policy of loaning to Canadian embassies, “which had developed so extensively in recent years and which was so favourably reported on in the Massey Report should always have a high priority.”\textsuperscript{80}

Significantly, the report also placed emphasis on what it called the “projection of Canada abroad.” Lamenting the lack of international knowledge of, and appreciation for, Canadian culture, the report insists, as was quoted at the beginning of the chapter, that the international promotion of Canadian culture is of immense importance. The report discussed the various ways in which cultural institutions had previously projected Canadian culture internationally, including the NGC, but continues by urging that these efforts be increased. It is also mentioned that Canada’s efforts to project culture internationally pale in comparison to the efforts of other countries, such as Great Britain, France and the U.S., and that the country should strive to emulate these efforts. This urge to imitate the initiatives of other, traditionally more powerful, nations is echoed in the correspondence surrounding Canadian biennial participation.

Also of particular significance is the portion of the report that suggests that the international projection of culture is important both for political reasons and for the development of culture domestically. The report reads,

\textsuperscript{79} Litt, 45.
\textsuperscript{80} National Gallery of Canada Archives [hereafter NGCA], National Gallery of Canada Fonds [hereafter NGCF], Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume 4, 22 May 1952.
These exchanges are valuable from the political point of view in creating a proper understanding of Canada abroad, but are also important, as we have said, in promoting the normal development of Canadian cultural life. We have heard of the work in this field from various sources, and have been forced to the conclusion that our cultural exchanges are still in an elementary and indeed in almost a non-existent stage.  

I contend that this statement about the utility of projecting Canadian culture abroad is echoed in the actions of both the NGC and External Affairs in the efforts towards biennial exhibitions. The suggestion that cultural exchange could be politically useful likely reaffirmed to External Affairs the already present notion that the exhibition of art could be used for diplomatic ends. Additionally, following Tony Bennett’s discussion of the exhibition of visual culture aiding in the constitution of social elements, the Massey Report’s emphasis on the impact that international cultural projection has on domestic cultural development may partially explain the intensity of the NGC’s efforts in Venice in particular.

Finally, despite the Massey Report’s insistence that efforts to project Canadian culture internationally be increased, it is important to note, as Evan Potter and Sean Rushton have, that the report does not provide any specific recommendations for how this should be achieved. This vagueness at least partially explains the highly disparate ways in which the NGC and External Affairs interpreted the task to “project Canada abroad” within the context of biennial participation. These differing interpretations on the part of the NGC and External Affairs are especially evident in the context of the 1951 São Paulo and 1952 Venice biennials.

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81 Ibid., 261.
São Paulo Bienal, 1951

In September 1950 William Stark at the Canadian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro received a letter from C.J. Van Tighem at the Canadian Consulate in São Paulo. Van Tighem wrote that the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo was planning to host a biennial-style exhibition the following year and that Canada had been invited to participate. He wrote that “the main purpose of [the] art exhibition is to congregate works and pieces from all countries” and that the biennial would take “anything modern.” Van Tighem advised that the biennial would “be of benefit not only to individual exhibitors but also should prove to be an excellent means of securing some propaganda for Canadian artists and Canada in general.”  

Van Tighem’s advice echoes goals that would be expressed in the Massey Commission report released in the following spring regarding the projection of Canadian culture. Additionally, it is clear that his interest in the biennial was based on the opportunity it offered to assert Canada’s image internationally.

In a letter issued several days later to the Canadian Embassy in Rio, the president of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho wrote, “This [is] an undertaking inspired by Venice and, although adapted to local conditions, we hope it will give São Paulo a prominent place in the artistic panoramas of the world.” While outwardly a relatively innocuous statement, the intellectual and political climate of the time was such that Sobrinho’s letter would have tacitly communicated to the Canadian Embassy that the biennial symbolized Brazil’s commitment to the international exchange of cultural expression – values which, at the time, were viewed as inherently Western.

82 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo Bienal, 1951, Van Tighem to Stark, 6 September 1950.
As Judith Higgins Balfe demonstrates, and I discuss briefly in the previous chapter, the impulse to communicate liberal values through the exhibition of artworks was hardly new. Indeed, at the end of WWII, Western European countries circulated exhibitions of Old Masters to various American museums, an endeavor Balfe suggests, encouraged positive feelings towards the victory of Western values over opposing ideologies.\(^8^4\) Similarly, the U.S. had previously sent works of modern art to various Latin American locations in a bid to bolster claims that American, and by extension Western, culture fostered artistic expression.\(^8^5\) A variety of biennial scholars agree that the São Paulo biennial can be seen as a similar attempt to project soft power and to indicate Brazil’s Western ideological proclivities, while also reaffirming the nation’s status as a modern, independent entity. As Caroline A. Jones asserts, “São Paulo founded its biennial...to turn a capital-friendly face to Cold War America through its embrace of ‘Rockefeller-artists’ endorsed by New York’s Museum of Modern Art.”\(^8^6\) Vincent Spricigo espouses a similar point of view, arguing that the São Paulo biennial indicated Brazil’s desire to assert its status as a modern, industrialized nation while also affirming the nation’s adherence to modern art and “North American postwar cultural diplomacy.”\(^8^7\) This indication towards an adherence to Western values on the part of Brazil would have made Canadian participation in the São Paolo biennial particularly attractive to the Department of External Affairs. Ultimately, by hosting a biennial that overtly catered to Western interests and ideologies, the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art was attempting to negotiate and reinforce Brazil’s political and cultural status on the international


\(^{8^5}\) Ibid., 200-201.

\(^{8^6}\) Caroline A. Jones, “Biennial Culture: A Longer History,” in *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvestbø (Bergen: Bergen Kunstall, 2010), 76.

stage. By extension, Canadian participation in the biennial would serve to indicate the Canadian government’s approval of Brazil’s adherence to liberal ideologies, as well as Canada’s own place within the Western political and cultural milieu.

The expression of Canadian foreign policy in Brazil was tenuous and complex at this point. As James Rochlin highlights, the first four decades of the twentieth century saw several Latin America countries encouraging Canada to join the Pan-American Union (PAU) because of the nation’s ties to Britain. This relationship was generally discouraged by the U.S. – a preference Rochlin suggests was due to U.S. concerns that Canada would serve in the PAU as a conduit for British concerns. However, by the end of the WWII, Canada had identified Brazil as one of several key Latin America countries of political and economic interest. Conversely, Brazil’s interest in the Canadian-owned Brazil Traction, Light, and Power Company and the company’s hopes for further Canadian investment, prompted it to encourage Canada to initiate a diplomatic mission in the country. Beyond Brazil, the Canadian government also considered Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Cuba as regions of economic interest in the area.88

In addition to commercial interests, both Canada and the U.S. had identified most of Latin America as an area susceptible to totalitarianism, thus a greater cultural presence in the area was viewed as a positive strategy in preventing any tendencies towards fascism, and, later, an anticipated shift to communism. The Canadian Information Service, the CBC, and the NFB all made a measure of effort to increase cultural relations with a number of Latin American countries.89 However, in spite of the concerns expressed above, the Canadian government ultimately remained hesitant to join the PAU or the Organization of American States (OAS).

89 Ibid., 16.
Rochlin suggests that this resistance was due in part to Canadian concerns regarding U.S. domination in both the PAU and the OAS, and to Canada’s cultural and political alienation from Latin America as a region. In fact, as Rochlin explains, Massey wrote an article on the issue, expressing his conviction that “Canada shared a cultural and political disposition with Europe, in contrast to the non-democratic region of Latin America.”

Given the complex nature of Canadian foreign policy with regard to Brazil and Latin America more generally, participation in the São Paulo biennial was likely viewed by External Affairs as a relatively non-committal opportunity to maintain positive cultural relations with Brazil and to culturally reinforce the country’s Western political and ideological tendencies.

In spite of the Department of External Affairs’ obvious interest in the event, it took substantial persuasion on the parts of the Department and biennial officials to convince the NGC to participate. Paul Tremblay, of the Information Division of External Affairs, initially contacted NGC director H.O. McCurry about the biennial in October 1950. He suggested that a NGC exhibition currently in Mexico be rerouted to São Paulo following its run, noting that the biennial would be “a very favourable opportunity for publicizing the achievements of Canadian art.”

External Affairs wrote two additional letters – one that month and one the next – before McCurry finally responded in late November. He recommended that Canada decline the invitation on the grounds that the NGC had not received enough notice and the demands placed on the NGC’s collection by other exhibitions had significantly decreased the number of available works.

Informed of the NGC’s decision, Sobrinho contacted the Canadian Embassy in Rio, writing that

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90 Ibid., 29.
91 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo Bienal, 1951, Tremblay to McCurry, 23 October 1950.
other countries had also expressed concern about the short turnaround and that the biennial would consequently be postponed for several months to encourage increased participation.

In turn, the Embassy wrote a lengthy memo to External Affairs, copied to the NGC, strongly urging Canadian participation in the biennial. The Embassy emphasized that the NGC had already sent several exhibitions of Canadian art to Brazil in the late 1940s, and that these endeavours had attracted the attention of the international press, as well as several important individuals from Brazilian government and business circles. Ultimately the Embassy strongly recommended that the NGC organize an exhibition for the São Paulo biennial and that the works sent to São Paulo be subsequently shown in Rio, suggesting that a NGC exhibition currently in Washington could be later sent to Brazil. The Embassy’s suggestion that the Canadian submission to the biennial could also be shown in Rio suggests the degree to which it saw the Bienal as providing an opportunity to increase Canada’s profile more generally in Brazil and, in doing so support its larger effort to foster positive cultural relations with Brazil as a whole.

McCurry reluctantly agreed in March 1951 to participate in the São Paulo biennial, writing that “if our important exhibitions now out are returned to Ottawa by the middle of June, it might be possible to arrange a modest contribution to the First Biennial Exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art in Brazil, provided the Trustees agree that this might be done.” In May of that year, however, McCurry attempted to renege on his agreement, citing a lack of time and NGC resources in a letter to the Brazilian ambassador to Canada. Sobrinho responded by writing to McCurry directly, insisting that “Canadian participation, no matter how small in number [of works], would not only be proof of the friendly cultural relations between our two

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93 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, São Paulo Bienal, 1951, McCurry to Tremblay, 29 March 1951.
countries, but also a most interesting event in the field of international art.” McCurry finally agreed to participate in June, suggesting that the NGC would send what he called a “token exhibition.” He was aware that External Affairs pressed for participation in the São Paulo biennial for reasons related to cultural diplomacy. In a July 20, 1951 letter to painter Lawren Harris, McCurry stated,

We replied that the time was a little short to produce an adequate exhibition, but subsequently the authorities in Brazil and the Brazilian Ambassador here pressed for a Canadian contribution and said they would be satisfied if Canada was represented by a token collection of fifteen or twenty pictures. The Department of External Affairs approved, and it seems desirable, because of the cordial relations between our two countries, that we should make an effort to accede to their urgent request.

Harris expressed disdain for the idea of sending works to the São Paulo biennial, suggesting that galleries in Canada and the U.S. should receive priority over Brazil. His negative reaction and sympathy with McCurry’s position belies a general bias among the cultural elite towards art exhibitions and events that reinforced the Western canon and its major sites. It is clear that at least significant members of the cultural elite viewed Brazil as peripheral in this regard.

A “token exhibition” was, indeed, what the NGC organized. The NGC sent thirty paintings in a variety of styles and techniques by twenty-one different artists of varied prominence from an array of regions across Canada. Included in the exhibition were A.Y. Jackson and Arthur Lismer, landscape artists once members of the Group of Seven; Paul-Émile Borduas and Jean-Paul Riopelle, Montreal abstractionists who were prominent members of *Les Automatistes*; other Montreal-based painters, both abstract and figurative, including Albert Dumouchel, Marion Dale Scott, Goodridge Roberts, and Leon Bellefleur; Toronto-based painters,

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94 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo Bienal, 1951, Sobrinho to McCurry, 4 June 1951.
95 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo Bienal, 1951, McCurry to Harris, 21 July 1951.
including Paraskeva Clark; and BC-based artists, including Charles Binning and Molly Lamb Bobak. Neither the selection of artists and paintings nor the catalogue make explicit a curatorial narrative or rationale – the absence of which is reinforced by the title of the show, “Some Aspects of Canadian Painting.” The works of the chosen artists span a broad range of styles and twelve of the paintings listed in the catalogue entry are not given dates. The eighteen works that were assigned dates were painted between 1945 and 1951.

The catalogue entry for the biennial provides a vague narrative outlining the development of painting in Canada. The entry begins by stressing the relative immaturity and international origins of Canadian art – a narrative created and commonly used by the NGC that would be seen repeatedly in future biennial catalogues:

The childhood of Canadian art was a long one, stretching over a period of three hundred years. From its birth in the seventeenth century it has passed under the successive influences of French and English art, and only in the present century has it shown signs of maturity or independence.96

This dual influence identified in the first sentence of the catalogue is used to trace the subsequent development of painting in Canada. The catalogue suggests that the French influence in Canadian painting is best seen in the work of James Morrice, whose “decorative” painting is likened and, to a degree, validated, by his working relationship with Henri Matisse. The English influence is identified as a Canadian proclivity to representational landscape, which, predictably, the catalogue suggests is epitomized by the Group of Seven.

This tendency to situate Canadian art in international trends continues throughout the catalogue. The work of such major figures on the Canadian art scene as Fritz Brantner, Marion Dale Scott, Molly Bobak, and Charles Binning are characterized as “Canadian versions of

contemporary trends like abstraction and expressionism." While particular emphasis is placed on the work of Alfred Pellan, the catalogue laments that his work could not be included in the biennial, which further demonstrates that the NGC’s submission was organized quickly. The catalogue concludes by reiterating the relative youth and the international origins of Canadian art, stating,

These movements are an indication of the artistic ferment which increases from year to year. An important element in this process – and this will interest our friends in South America – is the awakening of the Latin genius which for so long has lain dormant in Canadian painting. It has been pointed out that the fusion of the Anglo-Saxon with the French contributions can be more easily carried out in painting, where there is no language barrier, than in most other fields. It is in painting, therefore, that we in Canada can catch a glimpse of the possible future of our culture. We have after all scarcely reached the threshold of our maturity.  

The tendency to situate developments in Canadian art in the context of international trends is likely, as asserted by Sandra Paikowsky in the case of Venice, an attempt on the part of the NGC to communicate Canada’s relative newness as an independent nation and its even newer status as a “middle power” – that is, as a nation of secondary political and cultural importance to more powerful nations such as the U.S., but still possessing a measure of cultural influence. The political dimension of this narrative is made more complex by the catalogue’s insertion of the modernist tenet that painting can foster meaningful cultural exchange because of its ability to transcend language barriers and attain universality. The catalogue’s conclusion is that international relations can be executed and improved through cultural exchange. Thus, while the NGC may not have been particularly eager to participate in the São Paulo biennial, and may have

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97 Ibid.  
98 Ibid.  
preferred a different venue for the projection of Canadian culture, its overall goals dovetailed with those of External Affairs in their shared adherence to liberal democratic values.

While the NGC would participate in every São Paulo Bienal until 1969, McCurry ultimately (though not surprisingly) expressed disappointment with the outcome of the event. In a letter to Leon Bellefleur, he lamented the less-than-prominent placement of Canada’s entry, as well as the lack of international recognition of the Canadian contribution, suggesting that “the exhibition attracted some attention but was not given as prominent a place in the gallery as we think it deserved. No doubt if Canada participates in 1953,” he added, “we will be able to get our ambassador in Rio to secure better accommodation for our contribution.”

Having reluctantly agreed to participate, it appears that the NGC was now invested in the biennial culture particular to São Paulo to the extent that it was already anticipating a better showing and a place in the gallery venue more reflective of its self perceived authority in 1953.

**Venice Biennale, 1952**

In contrast to São Paulo, the Venice Biennale was of substantial interest to the NGC. Clearly aware of the lack of knowledge of and interest in Canadian art abroad and of the prestige of the Biennale, the NGC had been lobbying for the federal government to secure an invitation to the event as early as the summer of 1950. Donald Buchanan, then assistant director of the NGC, wrote to McCurry from the 1950 Biennale emphasizing the quality of the modern art present,

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subsequently mentioning briefly that Canada might receive an invitation for the 1952 Biennale. Soon thereafter, Buchanan presented a report on international exhibitions to the NGC Board of Trustees which recommended the inclusion of three or four contemporary painters for exhibition in the main Biennale pavilion. So eager was the NGC to participate that, when an official invitation had not been received as of October 1951, McCurry wrote to the Biennale’s Secretary General, Rodolfo Pallucchini, to enquire about the status of Canada’s invitation. An invitation had, in fact, been sent to Canada’s ambassador in Rome in October, though External Affairs did not forward this invitation to the NGC until November.

While External Affairs was the initial recipient of the invitation, and was somewhat involved in the preparations for the Biennale, it was substantially less concerned with the Venice Biennale than it was with the São Paulo Bienal. External Affairs appeared to agree with the NGC’s desire to participate, but its interest seemed relatively tepid. Canadian foreign relations with Italy, at this point, are described by Sandra Paikowsky as “cordial.” Canada had signed the United Nations Peace Treaty with Italy in 1947 and the nation’s diplomatic mission in Rome was established as an embassy in 1948. Trade relations between the two countries were growing slowly despite slight apprehension on the part of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. The two nations did, however, experience some disagreement regarding financial repatriation from WWII.

In spite of the political and economic relations between Canada and Italy, Canada did not yet have a cultural agreement with Italy. Indeed, Paikowsky characterizes most Canadian

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104 Paikowsky, 134-135.
attempts at international cultural relations in the immediate postwar period as relatively *ad hoc*.\(^{105}\)

Thus while External Affairs almost certainly saw the Biennale as a venue for the projection of Canada abroad, it is likely that it did not fully consider international biennial culture generally as an opportunity for a cohesive programme of cultural exchange.

In spite of the relative apathy on the part of External Affairs, the Biennale had recently gained, as Paikowsky asserts, “enormous significance for both its participants and its audience as the cultural symbol of the political, social and economic reconstruction of Europe.”\(^{106}\) Indeed, the organizers of the Venice Biennale in the postwar period were eager to communicate their adherence to Western values and ideologies. Nancy Jachec characterizes the Venice Biennale in the postwar and early Cold War period as a product of liberal democratic ideologies. She argues that Giovanni Ponti and Rodolfo Pallucchini, head commissioner and head secretary, respectively, of the Biennale, demonstrated a dedication to abstract art which eventually “would be read as shorthand for the commitment to the freedom of individual expression that had survived, and more importantly, resisted occupation across Western Europe during the Second World War.”\(^{107}\) The Biennale’s goals in this regard were echoed by the Italian government which also hoped to use cultural diplomacy as a means of reaffirming its commitment to Western values as well as Italy’s status as a Western nation after several years under a fascist regime.\(^{108}\)

Given its renewed prestige and prominence, the Biennale presented an opportunity for the NGC to present itself as the primary arbiter of Canadian art, as a participant in the international arts community, and also as a major agent of cultural diplomacy. Indeed, the NGC would

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\(^{105}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 134.


frequently situate itself as the sole recipient of the Canadian invitation to the Biennale – a “sleight-of-hand” Paikowsky attributes to the somewhat terse relationship between the NGC and External Affairs.\textsuperscript{109}

The NGC opted to present a highly conservative image of Canadian art. While a handwritten note indicates that the NGC was initially considering such prominent abstract artists as Binning, Borduas, and Riopelle, the senior staff of the NGC ultimately created a far more conservative program consisting of long-established artists such as Emily Carr, David Milne, Alfred Pellan, and Goodridge Roberts. Given the Biennale’s emphasis on the primacy of contemporary art, particularly abstraction, these choices seem curious. Carr, Milne, and Roberts are all generally figurative painters, and while Pellan created abstract paintings, his work is generally far more figurative than the works of Riopelle or Borduas. The conservative nature of the NGC’s choices likely indicates its desire to have a “safe,” non-controversial first showing at the Biennale. All four artists had been either exhibited by the NGC in the past or were represented in its permanent collection.\textsuperscript{110}

The choice of Emily Carr as a contemporary artist is peculiar as Carr had died in 1945 and, therefore, would not have been considered contemporary. Despite this, she would have been considered a contemporary of Milne’s, who was still alive as of 1952. Nonetheless, her inclusion likely made sense to the NGC for several key reasons. On one level, the “representative artists” constituting the Gallery’s selection indicates that it was sensitive to regional representation. Carr was identified as an artist of the West coast and the subject matter of her work spoke strongly of that part of Canada (see, for example, fig 1). In turn, Pellan was a prominent Quebec abstractionist at that time (see, for example, fig. 2). Milne and Roberts (see, for example, fig. 3)

\textsuperscript{109} Paikowsky, 141-142.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 145.
were known in part for their landscapes of rural Ontario, and Quebec, respectively. Beyond this regional selection, Carr was also likely the best candidate at this time to represent the landscape-based nationalist aesthetic touted by the NGC through the Group of Seven throughout the early 20th century. Milne was viewed as a key figure of Canadian modernism (see, for example, fig. 4), and Pellan was well-known as a follower of the School of Paris. Goodridge Roberts was an original member of the Eastern Group, which was also known for its stylistic ties to the School of Paris. Effectively, it seems that the NGC strove to create a balanced, if conservatively safe, selection of artists.

Figure 1. Blunden Harbour, Emily Carr, c. 1930; oil on canvas (129.8 x 93.6cm), National Gallery of Canada (4285). Exhibited at the 1952 Venice Biennale. Source: National Gallery of Canada, Cybermuse,

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Figure 2. Désir au clair de la lune, Alfred Pellan, 1937; oil on canvas (161.8 x 97.1 cm), National Gallery of Canada (6109) Exhibited at 1952 Venice Biennale. Source, National Gallery of Canada, Cybermuse.
Figure 3. *Landscape near Lake Orford*, Goodridge Roberts, 1945; watercolour and graphite on paper (53.9 x 74.9 cm), National Gallery of Canada (4867) Exhibited at 1952 Venice Biennale. Source, National Gallery of Canada, Cybermuse.

Figure 4. *Rites of Autumn III*, David Milne, 1943; watercolour and graphite on paper (37.2 x 55.5 cm), National Gallery of Canada (4604). Exhibited at 1952 Venice Biennale. Source, National Gallery of Canada, Cybermuse.
Paikowsky reaches a similar conclusion regarding the NGC’s artist selection suggesting that the conservative nature of the selection belies “the National Gallery’s definition of a circumscribed national artistic identity for foreign consumption. There was no attempt to present work that stood outside the evolutionary mainstream of Canadian art – a mainstream that had, in fact, been largely determined by the National Gallery.”

Ultimately, the NGC’s conservative selection indicates that while it was operating under the intention to highlight Canadian art internationally, this mission was laced inextricably with the senior staff’s intention to project the NGC and its prominent place in Canadian culture.

The catalogue, too, is highly revealing of how the NGC situated itself both domestically and internationally. The second sentence of R.H. Hubbard’s catalogue declares,

> The National Gallery of Canada has for many years been an advocate of the interchange of art exhibitions between countries to promote international understanding. This policy has enabled Canada to make her people familiar with the art of many other lands. It has also made it possible to send exhibitions of Canadian art to the nations of the Commonwealth and to a number of other countries especially in Europe.

This excerpt makes clear the NGC’s self-perception as the arbiter of Canadian art and as a primary agent of international cultural dialogue. However, it is interesting to note that the subsequent paragraph is substantially more passive: “A young nation is sensitive to what is said of her abroad, and thus the development of painting in Canada has been affected by the reactions to successive exhibitions of Canadian art.”

Thus while the NGC might situate itself centrally within the Canadian cultural and political landscape, it deliberately situated Canada as a peripheral nation within the international artistic and political milieu. Paikowsky interprets this

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112 Paikowsky, 154-155.
114 Ibid.
passivity as a bid on the NGC’s part to communicate Canada’s “unassuming but competent” status as a “middle power.”

While the NGC would control Canadian representation at the Biennale until 1986, McCurry seemed both underwhelmed by the quiet international response to Canada’s contribution but also certain the nation would be invited to exhibit again in the future. He wrote in a letter to A.Y. Jackson that he wished that Carr could have been the only artist included, although he noted that this would have “caused a howl in Canada.” In the same letter he also expressed hope that Canada might open a pavilion on the Biennale grounds, writing, “after all every important nation is represented there [at the Biennale] and why shouldn’t [sic] we be? If we are looking to the future, I think we should step up now.” The ambition to create a Canadian pavilion would in many ways dominate the NGC’s efforts at the Venice Biennale for the duration of the decade.

In contrast to McCurry’s reaction, correspondence sent between various External Affairs staffers indicates that their attentions were focused more upon the event as a method of reasserting the liberal value of open cultural exchange. For example, a report issued by the Pierre Dupuy, then the Canadian Ambassador in Rome, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs comments mostly on the benefits of the Biennale as an ideological tool for the West. Dupuy noted that “it is rather healthy that the West should have, almost at the border of the Communist empire, a demonstration of its vitality in the artistic field.”

115 Paikowsky, 155.
117 Ibid.
118 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1952, Dupuy to Secretary of State, Department of External Affairs, Canada, 17 June 1952.
These two reactions crystallize the varying ways in which the NGC and External Affairs conceived of the utility of international biennials and of the projection of Canada abroad. The reaction of External Affairs indicates that its primary motivation for “projecting Canada abroad” was the political and ideological impact of cultural exchange. In contrast, the NGC valued biennial participation for the opportunity it provided to promote its vision of Canadian art to the international arts community. Amid concerns regarding the survival of both Canadian culture and Western values and ideologies in the postwar era, visual culture, in this context, served as a conduit for the simultaneously divergent and intertwined agendas of the NGC and External Affairs. I continue to explore these issues in the next chapter, which examines Canadian participation in the 1957 São Paulo Bienal and the 1958 Venice Biennale.
Chapter 4

São Paulo Bienal, 1957 and Venice Biennale, 1958

Over a score of nations have had for some years their own pavilion in the grounds of the park, facing the lagoon, where the Biennale is held. Hence it had long been obvious to those interested that Canada, if it wished to prove convincingly that its art had come of age in the world, would itself have to build its own building there too.

Donald Buchanan, *Canadian Art*, 1958\(^{119}\)

Donald Buchanan’s statement is indicative of the National Gallery of Canada’s perception of the opening of a Canadian pavilion as the accumulation of its efforts at the Venice Biennale from 1952 onwards. In this chapter I examine Canadian participation in both the 1958 Venice Biennale – the year in which the NGC opened the Canadian pavilion -- and the 1957 São Paulo Bienal. I contend that the construction of a pavilion symbolized Canada’s “coming of age” in the context of postwar biennial culture. This emphasis on Canada’s increasing maturity within the international arts community also reinforced its status as a political and cultural “middle power” – a nation lacking the power of countries such as the U.S., but still possessing influence. Additionally, by attempting to reinforce Canada as a nation that valued culture and cultural exchange, the NGC further emphasized Canada’s connection to liberalism and liberal democracy.

The NGC’s intense emphasis on the Venice Biennale stands in contrast to its relative ambivalence to the 1957 São Paulo Bienal. The São Paulo Bienal was poised to become as significant an art event as Venice, but the NGC’s actions do not reflect that belief. Its attitude towards the Bienal was not as negative as it was in 1951; nonetheless, as far as the NGC was

concerned, the São Paulo Bienal remained more the priority of External Affairs as a means of exercising cultural diplomacy and projecting a positive cultural image of Canada abroad than a preferred NGC venue for Canadian art abroad. While the two agencies were operating under a shared premise that they were projecting Canada abroad and a common adherence to liberal democratic values, their goals regarding biennial participation remained disparate.

In this chapter I begin by examining Canadian participation in the 1957 Bienal. I focus largely on the breadth of the Canadian contribution and on the NGC’s willingness to outsource curatorial responsibility for several sections of the Canadian exhibition. My comparatively brief discussion of its ambivalent approach to the 1957 Bienal serves largely as a foil for the more lengthy examination of Canadian presence at the 1958 Venice Biennale and the opening of the Canadian pavilion, which I situate as the NGC’s symbolic “coming-of-age” within postwar biennial culture. I begin my discussion of the 1958 Biennale by contextualizing the opening of the Biennale pavilion in an examination of the NGC’s lengthy campaign to gain approval, gather funds, and construct the pavilion. I then analyze the visual arts exhibition submitted by the NGC for the Biennale, focusing in particular on the NGC’s situation of James Wilson Morrice as a key entry point for European influence on Canadian visual art. I conclude by discussing an NFB film, *City out of Time*. Funded jointly by the NGC and the NFB, *City out of Time* was created to commemorate the opening of the Canadian pavilion. I argue that the film is highly indicative of the goals of the Massey Commission as they pertain to the NGC, the cultural values of the liberal elite, and the specific brands of cultural nationalism and cultural diplomacy that informed the NGC’s efforts at the Venice Biennale.
São Paulo Bienal, 1957

By the 4th iteration of the São Paulo Bienal in 1957, the NGC did not seem as reluctant to participate in the exhibition as it had been in 1951. In fact, as early as 1954, Hubbard wrote in a letter that the São Paulo Bienal was becoming gradually more significant and prestigious in the international art world. However, the NGC’s behavior towards the Bienal did not reflect this belief. Particularly in comparison to the NGC’s intense efforts in connection with the 1958 Venice Biennale and the opening of the Canadian pavilion, its approach to the 1957 São Paulo Bienal seemed apathetic. Whereas in the 1958 Biennale, the NGC strove to create an exhibition that situated Morrice as the entry point for European influence on Canadian art (which I discuss at length later in the chapter), the Canadian presence at the 1957 Bienal was much less focused. It included four separate sections devoted to contemporary art, architecture, Inuit sculpture and theatre, three of which were not organized by the NGC. The Gallery’s willingness to outsource curatorial control, I contend, indicates the NGC’s sympathy with External Affairs’ view of São Paulo as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy and the international projection of Canadian culture.

Canadian participation at the 1957 São Paulo Bienal served as a means of projecting a broad view of Canadian culture (or, in the case of the Inuit sculpture section, appropriated indigenous cultures) to an international audience, as well as a method of sustaining positive cultural relations with Brazil.

As usual, the NGC curated the contemporary art section of the Canadian contribution to the Bienal. Three artists were included: Jean-Paul Lemieux, Takao Tanabe, and Harold Town. While it is unclear in correspondence related to the exhibition how or why the artists and artworks were chosen, the Canadian catalogue entry suggests that the NGC’s intention was to highlight the

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120 National Gallery of Canada Archives [hereafter NGCA], National Gallery of Canada Fonds [hereafter NGCF], Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo, 1955, McCurry to Newton, 6 August 1954.
breadth of contemporary art in Canada, both in the 1957 Bienal, as well as throughout successive Bienals:

Canada this year sends to São Paulo the work of three more of her painters. These represent but three out of the many aspects of contemporary art in Canada, for our painting today is surprisingly diversified in style. Twenty years ago it was almost completely dominated by a naturalistic landscape style; today it shows a rich variety of personal contributions to modern international surrealism, abstraction, tachism, and the rest. It is the policy of the National Gallery of Canada as organizer of this section to send to each successive Bienal a few of the most interesting of contributions, so that over the years the showings may amount to something like a complete picture of the development of Canadian art.  

This emphasis on the variety of visual art in Canada aligns the contemporary art section with the tone of the rest of the Canadian contribution and its stress on cultural breadth and variety.  

As I mention above, one major distinguishing characteristic of the 1957 Bienal from other Canadian biennial representations was the breadth of the Canadian showing at the Bienal and the NGC’s willingness to have other parties organize certain portions of the Canadian contribution. Beyond the traditional visual arts section, there were also sections devoted to architecture, theatre, and Inuit sculpture. The architecture section featured photographs of prominent Vancouver architecture taken by Graham Werrington. The NGC consulted with the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) to select the photographs. Both institutions reached the conclusion that Vancouver architecture should be represented at the Bienal, largely because the series was the only comprehensive set of architectural photographs readily available at the time.  

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122 NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo, 1957, Buchanan to Carroll, 10 July 1956.
Correspondence between the NGC and the RAIC indicate that the NGC hoped to have
the costs and organization of the architectural portion covered largely by the chosen architectural
firms in Vancouver and by the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission, which was part of
the Department of Trade and Commerce.\textsuperscript{123} In approaching the Department of Trade and
Commerce about the exhibition, External Affairs suggested that the exhibition would be “an
inexpensive and effective way of drawing attention in that part of the world to what is being done
at present in Canada in the architectural field.”\textsuperscript{124} The NGC’s willingness to outsource control of
the architectural exhibit, and its flippancy regarding the selection of content stands in stark
contrast to its more controlling attitude towards the 1958 Biennale. This more relaxed approach
seems indicative of the NGC’s acquiescence to External Affairs’ objective to utilize the São
Paulo Bienal as a conduit for cultural diplomacy and the broad projection of Canadian culture.

Further, the NGC had minimal involvement with either the Inuit sculpture section or the
theatre section. Both exhibits were coordinated through External Affairs, with the aid of the
Department of Northern Affairs and Stratford Theatre, respectively. Buchanan made this clear in
a letter to Profili, then general secretary of the Bienal, explicitly writing that the NGC had no
information on either exhibit to send to the organizers of the Bienal.\textsuperscript{125} Buchanan’s response to
Profili highlights the differences between the NGC’s approach to the 1957 Bienal and the NGC’s
behavior during both the 1952 and the 1958 Bienales, as in both cases, the NGC repeatedly
situated itself as the major arbiter of Canadian culture abroad.

Correspondence between the Canadian Embassy in Rio and the Under-Secretary of State
for External Affairs suggests that the Inuit sculpture exhibit, in particular, was likely created for

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo, 1957, Under-Secretary of State, External
Affairs, Ottawa to Deputy Minister, Trade and Commerce, Ottawa, 15 February1957.
\textsuperscript{125} NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo, 1957, Buchanan to Profili, 10 April 1957.
purposes related to cultural diplomacy and the projection of “Canadian” culture abroad. Beyond the 1957 Bienal, the exhibit was intended to travel elsewhere in South America, and eventually to Europe. Further, in addition to sculpture, the exhibition also included photographs and an essay by James Houston, an individual who strongly encouraged the creation of drawings and sculptures in the North, and the marketing of these artworks to other areas. While obviously it is not uncommon for visual art exhibitions to be accompanied by expository narratives, I argue that an exhibition of Inuit sculpture accompanied by an essay by James Houston in the late 1950s would almost certainly have been intended to foster narratives of a specific and unique “Canadian” culture.

To some degree, it seems that External Affairs’ goal to improve and sustain positive cultural relations with Latin America was successful as Canada was soon invited to participate in the first Pan-American Art Display. While it is not clear whether External Affairs accepted this offer or not, the invitation indicates that Bienal participation led to other opportunities for cultural diplomacy. However, beyond this invitation, External Affairs seemed underwhelmed with the

relative lack of international attention received by the Canadian exhibitions at the Bienal. In a report written by W. Arthur Irwin, then the Canadian Ambassador in Rio, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, it is noted that the Canadian contemporary art section in particular attracted only a “moderate degree of interest,” and that Museum of Modern Art director Alfred Barr criticized the selection for being “conservatively chosen.”\textsuperscript{130} The other three sections fared better in Irwin’s review, especially the theatre section, which Irwin felt was highly successful (though he does not state why).\textsuperscript{131} Regardless of the mixed reviews, the breadth of the Canadian contribution, the NGC’s relative apathy towards the Bienal, as well as the NGC’s willingness to have other parties organize major sections of the Canadian contribution, indicate both External Affairs’ sustained view of the Bienal as a conduit for cultural diplomacy, as well as the NGC’s sympathy with this goal.

\textbf{Venice Biennale 1958}

\textit{The Pavilion}

The construction of a Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale was a long-awaited goal of the NGC. The NGC had hardly completed its first showing at the Biennale when McCurry expressed the hope that Canada, or more specifically the NGC, would soon have its own structure on the Biennale grounds. As I mention in Chapter 1, McCurry initially discussed the possibility of Canada constructing a pavilion in a November 1952 letter to A.Y. Jackson. Soon after, in a 1953 NGC Board of Trustees meeting, Kathleen Fenwick, the Gallery’s Curator of Prints and Drawings, recommended that Canada “emulate the initiative of other nations in this respect and

\textsuperscript{130} NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Sao Paulo, 1957, Irwin to Under-Secretary of State, External Affairs, Ottawa, 18 October 1957.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
build a suitable small pavilion to house Canadian art on a site donated by the authorities of the Biennale."\textsuperscript{132} This desire on the part of the NGC to follow the lead of more powerful countries, as well as a sense of insecurity regarding Canada’s status at the Biennale permeated the NGC’s drive to establish a permanent pavilion. Indeed, when McCurry contacted Pallucchini regarding a Canadian section at the 1954 Biennale, Pallucchini responded by suggesting that, while he would be happy for Canada to participate at the next Biennale, there were many countries vying for space in the central pavilion and it was the Biennale’s protocol to establish a rotation among the countries without pavilions.\textsuperscript{133} While Canada was eventually allowed space in the central pavilion for the 1954 Biennale, Pallucchini’s letter made clear that, without an individual pavilion, NGC presence at the Biennale could not be guaranteed.

The NGC also received strong encouragement to build a pavilion from other individuals in the art world. W.G. Constable, then Curator of Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston wrote to the NGC to stress the importance of maintaining a strong presence at the Biennale. Constable argued that exhibiting art at the Biennale was a direct manifestation of recommendations the Massey Commission, but warned that showing in the central pavilion would lead to the Canadian contribution being overlooked. Given the relative lack of knowledge of Canadian culture abroad, Constable asserted, it would be highly beneficial if Canada could build a pavilion in which they could highlight both their historical and contemporary artists. Beyond cultural representation, however, Constable also noted that the construction of a pavilion could aid cultural diplomacy:

In recent years, travelling in many countries, I have been much impressed and interested by the change which is taking place in the work of national representatives. Ease of communication and speed of travel have largely deprived ambassadors of the power to initiate and carry through matters of policy. Increasingly, their importance seems to lie in social and cultural activities; and I have noticed how attention to these always increases an ambassador’s prestige, and consequently that of his country. So, participation in such events as the Biennale, with full support of Canada’s representatives in Italy, would be fully in line with some of the more fruitful developments in international relations.\(^\text{134}\)

Concerns raised by Constable, such as his conflation of cultural and political prestige, as well as his warning that Canadian art risked being ignored internationally would be seen repeatedly throughout the NGC’s bid to construct a pavilion.

Throughout the preparations of the 1954 Biennale, McCurry and Hubbard consistently situated the construction of a pavilion as a significant factor to the international reception of Canadian culture. In a February 1954 letter, McCurry wrote that lacking a pavilion at the Venice Biennale put Canada “out of step with all the rest of the civilized world.”\(^\text{135}\) Additionally, during the October 1953 Board of Trustees meeting it was mentioned that “in the fifty years since the Biennale di Venezia was first opened in Venice all the principal [sic] European countries as well as the United States and Argentine [sic] have built national fine arts pavilions within the grounds of the Biennale….”\(^\text{136}\) Evidently, the impulse to construct a pavilion was situated largely as a bid to emulate the efforts of other more culturally and politically powerful countries.

While the NGC’s contribution to the 1954 Biennale highlighted the works of Charles Binning, Paul-Emile Borduas, and Jean-Paul Riopelle, I argue that it also, in part, served as a

\(^\text{136}\) NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1954, McCurry to Harris, 8 January 1954.
campaign designed to demonstrate Canada’s need to build a pavilion. The 1954 catalogue entry, written by Hubbard, discusses the NGC’s desire to construct a permanent pavilion before even mentioning the names of the included artists:

> It is our hope that Canada will exhibit regularly in this way for many years to come, so that the work of all her most interesting painters may be shown in succession as they appear. This we realize is a long-term project which should cause us to make an effort to secure our own pavilion at the Biennale.\(^{137}\)

Further, in Hubbard’s report to the Board of Trustees detailing his trip to Europe, much of his discussion centers on the need for Canada to open a permanent pavilion alongside a comparison of Canada’s showing at the Biennale to the efforts of other countries. Hubbard reiterated that exhibiting in the central pavilion did not guarantee Canada a spot in future biennials. He also lamented that twenty other countries had already constructed pavilions on the Biennale grounds, including Israel and Venezuela, which Hubbard dismissed as countries of “lesser importance.”\(^{138}\)

One of Hubbard’s most striking attempts to gain favor towards building a pavilion at the Venice Biennale is his autumn 1954 *Canadian Art* article, “Show Window of the Arts at the 27\(^{th}\) Venice Biennale.” Similar to the Biennale catalogue entry of the same year, Hubbard’s agenda to promote the construction of a pavilion is much more prominent than the article’s claim to provide an overview of the Biennale. Characterizing the Biennale as the United Nations of the art world, Hubbard emphasizes the significance of the Biennale as a site for reinforcing national identity and participating in a dialogue with other nations. He continues by emphasizing that “countries so young or small as Israel or Venezuela” have constructed pavilions and that available space within the Biennale grounds is rapidly shrinking.


Hubbard explicitly compares the Biennale’s jury day to the United Nations, emphasizing the presence of the “polite but insistent French, the diplomatic British and Belgians and Dutch, the ebullient Egyptians…and the Iron Curtain exercise[ing] the veto or the nearest thing to it.” He concludes that the jurors opted to “canoniz[e] the saints of surrealism,” by awarding prizes to retrospective exhibitions on Max Ernst, Hans Arp, and Joan Miro. By evoking both the Western canonical artists and the United Nations in his description of the Biennale’s distribution of prizes, Hubbard conflates cultural and political power. He concludes by suggesting that Canada had the potential to wield this sort of cultural and political authority, but that it is impossible for it to do so without a pavilion. “I feel that painting in Canada is at present definitely in the running,” he writes, “just as she is in the thick of world politics and economics.” Significantly, he also emphasizes that the NGC has been a long-standing supporter of the international exhibition. Thus, beyond establishing Canada’s need to construct a pavilion at the Biennale, the article makes clear that the NGC was the only institution fit to represent Canada in this context, thus reinforcing the NGC’s status as the arbiter of Canadian art and as a key agent of cultural diplomacy.

By 1956 it was confirmed that a Canadian pavilion would be constructed on Biennale grounds. Not surprisingly, the NGC assumed full control over corresponding with Biennale authorities regarding the pavilion, eventually informing External Affairs of its plans officially in February 1956 in a letter from newly appointed director Alan Jarvis to External Affairs. The budget for the pavilion amounted to $25,000 CDN, which came from blocked WWII repatriation funds from the Italian government.

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140 Ibid., 20.
141 NGCA, NGCF, Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume 6, 23-24 May 1956.
The NGC commissioned Enrico Peressutti of the Italian architecture firm, BBPR, to design the pavilion and to oversee its construction. The NGC was already familiar with Peressutti; in 1954 he advised Hubbard on contemporary Venetian architecture and he had visited the Gallery in the past.\textsuperscript{142} A report on the pavilion in a May 1956 Board of Trustees meeting indicates that Peressutti’s services were solicited, at least in part, because he resided in Italy and thus was familiar with local conditions and could supervise construction of the pavilion on site.\textsuperscript{143} Beyond the convenience of close proximity, there are no other recorded reasons for employing Peressutti, nor is there any indication that the NGC had specific design goals or creative input. In fact, it appears that the NGC knew very little about design or the technical specifications of the pavilion until its completion; the Gallery was unaware, for example, that the pavilion held only 150 people and planned an opening reception for 300.\textsuperscript{144}

The resulting pavilion was a spiral-shaped structure composed of glass, steel and brick (figs. 5 and 6). In the centre of the pavilion was a large tree encased in glass; a feature created out of necessity as the trees in the area were prohibited from being removed as per laws left over from Napoleonic rule.\textsuperscript{145} As Josée Drouin-Brisebois suggests, the design of the pavilion fell largely in line with contemporary trends in Italian architecture and with BBPR’s other recent work.\textsuperscript{146} The pavilion’s permanent walls had 101 feet of available wall space, and moveable

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1958, Canadian Embassy, Rome to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, 19 May 1958.
\textsuperscript{146} See Chapter 2, p. #11.
partitions increased wall space to up to 221 feet, although Buchanan wrote that the inclusion of the partitions led to the pavilion feeling cramped.\textsuperscript{147}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure5.jpg}
\caption{Figure 5. Exterior shot of the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign. Venice Biennale, 1958.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure6.jpg}
\caption{Figure 6. Interior shot of the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. NGCA, NGCF, File: EX877. Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign. Venice Biennale, 1958.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{147} NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign. Venice Biennale, 1958, Buchanan to Jarvis and Hubbard, 9 September 1957.
As the pavilion neared completion, the NGC touted the pavilion's unusual and contemporary design, advancing it as one of the most compelling and visually appealing pavilions on the Biennale grounds. In a 1957 Board of Trustees meeting, it was reported that

The Associate Director examined the building in its final stages of construction, and can say without hesitation that it is, architecturally, the most original and attractive pavilion in the Biennale grounds. While small, it is strategically situated between two of the main buildings, the British and German ones. The natural surroundings blend perfectly: for example, the gallery is built round two majestic trees that have been left to rise from the gallery floor through the roof.\footnote{NGCA, NGCF, Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume 5, 18-19 September 1957.}

The report is significant in two ways. The first lies in the NGC’s emphasis on the quality of the pavilion’s design; within less than a decade, the pavilion’s unusual design would no longer be viewed as an asset. In fact, by 1966 there were even discussions among NGC staff about replacing the pavilion with something larger and more functional.\footnote{NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1966, Blom, “Report on the Canadian Exhibition at the 33rd Biennale, Venice,” 1966.} This, along with NGC’s relative ignorance of the pavilion’s design until after its completion, suggests that, during the 1950s, NGC simply wanted a pavilion -- any pavilion -- to house its Biennale contribution. The second is the NGC’s suggestion that the building be located between the British and German pavilions was made for strategic reasons. As Valentine Moreno indicates, national pavilions at the Biennale serve partially to indicate power and prestige on both the artistic and political levels.\footnote{Valentine Moreno, “Venice Biennale and the Canada Pavilion: Politics of Representation in the Gardens of Art.” \textit{Faculty of Information Quarterly} 3.1 (2010): 9.} By constructing a pavilion, the NGC was attempting to symbolically join the ranks of nations that had been among the world’s leading imperial powers and whose artists formed significant portions of the Western art tradition. In suggesting that the Canadian pavilion’s location between Britain and Germany, and its close proximity to France, was strategic, it is clear that the NGC
was attempting to identify itself with the cultural authority of these other countries. I contend that the endeavor was about creating and reinforcing a national cultural identity while also reinforcing Canada’s increasing maturity in the context of postwar biennial culture. The NGC was both attempting to negotiate the status of Canada as an autonomous middle power with its own unique culture while also implying its sustained relationship with other Western powers and their associated liberal values.

The significance of the pavilion to the NGC is further reflected in its frenzied and disorganized efforts to host a lavish opening reception, much to the apparent chagrin of External Affairs. Correspondence between the NGC and External Affairs suggests that the NGC was far more concerned with the optics of the opening reception than the logistics of hosting such an event. As Jarvis wrote to C.P. Fell, then Chair of the NGC Board of Trustees, the opening of a Canadian pavilion at the Biennale represented Canada joining other “civilized” countries in their cultural endeavors.\(^1\)

The NGC planned for a reception for three hundred people at the pavilion, although there is also evidence in correspondence between External Affairs staffers that over six hundred and fifty invitations had been issued. This plan was problematic as the pavilion could only hold one hundred and fifty people.\(^2\) Correspondence between External Affairs officials in Rome and Ottawa indicate that when this issue was mentioned to Buchanan, his response was that the invitation list could not be truncated and that the reception should consequently be moved outside.\(^3\) If it rained on the day of the reception, it was hoped that a sufficient number of

\(^1\) NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1958, Jarvis to Fell, 8 May 1958.
invitees would be dissuaded by the poor weather so that the reception could be moved inside. A memo from External Affairs to Jarvis indicates the department’s displeasure at the proceedings:

Well, the pavilion did get opened. Glancing back through the file this seems like a remarkable achievement. In fact, if I go back far enough – to May 6 a year ago – I find a telegram from us, just one communication in a series, saying ‘Pavilion Venice. Contractor threatening to quit unless payment forthcoming immediately.’ He didn’t quit, and neither did we: though on a number of occasions we felt like the contractors.

The memo continues,

But the problem is not one of Embassy morals nor the extra workload which inevitably fell on us because of confused administrative arrangements. The problem is that we did not put on a very good show in Venice, and we came uncomfortably close to fiasco. That does not help Canada’s prestige in Italy and in an international enterprise, and that is the concern of the Embassy. But neither does such a situation help the National Gallery or those people and organizations who are working for the cultural development of Canada. I am sure that is of concern to you.

The heated correspondence between External Affairs and the NGC indicates two significant points. The first is that the NGC valued the Venice Biennale and its presence therein to such an extent that it rushed into hastily constructing a pavilion for a meager sum and organized a lavish reception for which it did not possess the necessary means. The second point of interest is the relative ambivalence of the Department of External Affairs to the NGC’s emphasis on constructing a pavilion. The memo quoted extensively above suggests that the External Affairs’ concerns were limited to the vaguely defined goal of projecting a Canadian cultural presence abroad; it is likely that its goals for the Venice Biennale were not nearly as specific or grandiose as the NGC’s.

156 Ibid.
The Exhibition

Given the pavilion’s symbolic significance to the NGC as Canada’s “coming of age” within postwar biennial culture, the NGC required an actual exhibition to accompany the pavilion. The NGC opted to present a Morrice retrospective (which included fig. 7) as the major component of the exhibition, along with works by contemporary artists Jacques de Tonnancour, Anne Kahane and Jack Nichols. Morrice had exhibited extensively in France and Britain and maintained an excellent reputation abroad.157 Given his past successes in Europe, Morrice was an undeniably safe choice. Additionally, his lengthy stays in France led to working relationships with major French painters including Henri Matisse; relationships that were credited as being highly influential and beneficial for Morrice’s work.

Figure 7. Landscape, Tangiers, James Wilson Morrice, 1912; oil on canvas (65.5 x 81.7 cm), National Gallery of Canada (6108). Exhibited at the 1958 Venice Biennale. Source: National Gallery of Canada, Cyermuse.

The emphasis on international influence is also seen in the NGC’s Biennale catalogue entry for that year. The catalogue entry begins by emphasizing the pavilion and the NGC’s key role in Canadian representation at the Venice Biennale: “The pavilion, designed by the Italian architect, Enrico Peresutti, was commissioned by the Canadian government through the National Gallery of Canada which has been entrusted with the Canadian section since the beginning.”

The entry continues by situating Morrice as the point of origin for European influence into Canadian art:

He [Morrice] is probably the best painter Canada has yet produced, and his position is enhanced by the fact of his being the first to introduce Canada to modern movements in art. Before him, we were an artistic backwater into which European movements arrived a quarter of a century late; after him we began to swim in the full stream of western art. In his own time Morrice could not have been what he was by remaining in Canada. He was born in Montreal and, after a short period spent studying law in Toronto, he became an expatriate in Paris…Later he became the friend of some of the most important painters of his time, notably the Fauves.

Of the included artists, Morrice is undeniably the focal point. However it is important to note that the new pavilion is discussed first. Jacques de Tonnancour, a Quebecois landscape painter, is given a paragraph later in the catalogue, which discusses the evolution of his painting style, with particular emphasis placed on his work, which was influenced by the School of Paris. Anne Kahane and Jack Nichols -- a sculptor and painter/printmaker, respectively -- the other two contemporary artists included in the Biennale, are given almost incidental mention in the catalogue entry’s final paragraph. The paragraph reads,

A sculptor and a printmaker give a further indication of what younger artists are doing in Canada today. Variety is of the essence of Canadian art: it could hardly be otherwise in a country of such vast distances. The sculptor is Anne Kahane, whose carved groups of figures are refreshingly original in

159 Ibid.
conception and vigorous in execution. The printmaker is Jack Nichols, who began his work under the influence of the sadness of the early Picasso, and who has recently come to the realization of his own integrity and strength in a fine series of large lithographs.\textsuperscript{160}

Nichols, Kahane and, to a lesser extent, Tonnancour are treated as ancillary additions to the Morrice retrospective. Given the characterization of Morrice as the entry point for European influence into Canadian art, they are effectively situated as three of many Canadian artists who were indirectly influenced by Morrice. These priorities are emphasized by the number of works chosen for each artist: twenty-two from Morrice, eleven from Tonnancour, seven from Nichols, and five from Kahane.

Significantly, the catalogue neglects to mention any specific works included in the Biennale, and only gives broad descriptions of the artists’ styles, and their various sources of influence. The entry privileges the NGC’s role in the Biennale, the construction of the new pavilion, and Morrice as a key figure in the history of Canadian art. The entry is not about specific works of art so much as projecting a specific image of Canadian art and culture and of the NGC.

\textit{City out of Time}

The NGC’s goals and intentions for the 1958 Venice Biennale are reflected largely in a 1959 National Film Board production entitled \textit{City out of Time}. Directed by Colin Low, \textit{City out of Time} was developed to mark the opening of the Canadian pavilion at the Biennale and was funded jointly by the NGC and the NFB.\textsuperscript{161} Beyond the NGC’s goals for the 1958 Biennale, I contend that \textit{City out of Time} encapsulates the goals of the Massey Commission as they pertain to

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} NGCA, NGCF, Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume 7, 17-19 September 1960.
the NGC, the liberal values of the cultural elite, and the specific brands of cultural nationalism and cultural diplomacy that informed the NGC’s efforts at the Venice Biennale.

*City out of Time* begins by featuring long, indulgent takes of historic scenery around Venice. Narrator William Shatner stoically muses, “A moment passes, but in stone, in paint, in art, time can have a stop.” Immediately, the film invokes a central tenet of modernism: namely that art has universal and enduring value, a belief that was also held by the liberal cultural elite. The film then cuts to shots of downtown Ottawa, before highlighting the interior of the NGC. Children, presumably on a school field trip, are seen walking through NGC gallery spaces before being led to a Venetian painting (fig. 8). Shatner continues by touting the cultural significance of historic Venice, before emphasizing that the city and its culture are in “decline.” He suggests that in the 18th century, no man’s education was complete without a Venetian pilgrimage. The discussion of the significance of Venice to a cultural education in combination with the shots of schoolchildren learning about Venetian art strongly reinforces the NGC’s role as a major arbiter of culture in Canada and as a major educative agent for Canadians, bringing fine art to its young people.

![Figure 8. City out of Time (1959, Colin Low), featuring Canadian school children at the National Gallery of Canada.](image)
As the film returns to highlighting popular Venetian destinations filled with tourists from a variety of countries, Shatner considers the definition of art and the difference between a “picture” and something “that will be treasured through the ages,” before musing about the controversy often caused by the latest trend or movement in art. As he poses these questions, the camera focuses on Biennale-attendees impassionedly but respectfully viewing and debating art. In this respect, the film was effectively modeling ideal gallery-behavior to its viewers. It features individuals who are sufficiently educated in and engaged with “high” culture to participate in a considered discussion about art. As Zoe Druick argues, the depiction of ideal behavior in film was a common educative strategy of the NFB. She suggests that “the NFB present[ed] an excellent site for reading narratives of ideal citizenship.” While the people shown in the film likely were not Canadian, and it is certain that not many Canadians attended the Biennale at this time, *City out of Time* nonetheless provides a model of the sort of cultural engagement viewed by the liberal elite as a necessary condition for the liberal democratic citizenship espoused by the Massey Commission.

*City out of Time* attempts to answer some of its previously posed questions about the “enduring value of art” by highlighting the Morrice paintings in the Canadian pavilion. Shatner narrates that Morrice’s work in the Canadian pavilion provides “one piece to the riddle” in reference to the definition or value of art. As the film focuses on people gazing intently at the Morrice paintings (fig. 9), Shatner suggests that, because of a resemblance to work by the Impressionists, Morrice’s work was initially met with derision, a phenomenon Shatner insists happens to many innovative contemporary artists. The film’s segue into its discussion of Morrice

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and the Canadian pavilion and the interspersion of shots between the Biennale and the rest of Venice is highly strategic. The film is effectively aligning the art shown at the Biennale with the Western tradition of art, while situating the Canadian (or NGC) contribution to the Biennale as a significant portion thereof.

Figure 9. City out of Time (1959, Colin Low), depicting visitors to the Canadian Pavilion examining and discussing paintings by Morrice.

Ultimately, City out of Time is an excellent indicator of the NGC’s attitudes towards the Venice Biennale, its role therein, and its role domestically. By consistently invoking modernism’s insistence on the universal value of art and the benefits of cultural engagement to a democratically engaged citizenry, while interspersing those themes with an overarching discussion of the NGC and its role both in Canada and at the Venice Biennale, the film attempts to reinforce Canada’s NGC-sanctioned “coming of age” in postwar biennial culture and, by extension, the NGC’s crucial role to cultural life in Canada. This stands in immediate contrast to the NGC’s treatment of the 1957 São Paulo Bienal. By the 4th iteration of the Bienal, the NGC had clearly opted to leave the Bienal largely under the domain of External Affairs which, I argue,
attempted to create a varied exhibition to emphasize a broad and unique view of Canadian culture. Ultimately, the actions and agendas of the NGC and External Affairs emphasizes both their shared liberal values, but their highly disparate interpretations of the Massey Commission’s instruction to project Canadian culture abroad.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

[The] international aspect of the Massey Commission underscores the connection between politics and culture in Cold War Canada providing a clear case of how international political language becomes entangled with - and helps to legitimize - artistic and cultural endeavors.


As Zoe Druick asserts, a substantial amount of cultural activity in postwar Canada became entangled in the intersection between nationalism and internationalism. The Canadian cultural elite’s ideological tendency towards liberalism manifested itself in an intense interest in the survival of Canadian culture in the wake of modern life and U.S. mass culture industries, as well as in concerns regarding the survival of liberal values in the ideologically polarized atmosphere of the Cold War. These concerns both informed and appeared in the 1951 Royal Commission on the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, also known as the Massey Commission. With this context in mind, this thesis explores Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials from 1951 to 1958. Recognizing that biennial-style exhibitions foster complex dialogues between a variety of agents, both cultural and political, I contend that a comparative analysis of Canadian participation in these two international biennials provides a framework for examining the complicated relationships between visual art, cultural nationalism, and cultural diplomacy in the postwar era.

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I argue that the National Gallery of Canada and the Department of External Affairs, despite possessing a shared adherence to liberalism, each interpreted the Massey Commission’s vague demand that cultural institutions “project Canada abroad,” in very different ways. Drawing upon Judith Higgins Balfe’s conception of the utilization and manipulation of visual culture for nationalistic or diplomatic ends, I assert that that Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale was a means of maintaining the presence of an NGC-defined culture of Canadian art to an international audience, while also reinforcing the NGC’s status as the primary arbiter of Canadian art. Conversely, participation in the São Paulo Bienal served primarily as a conduit for the Department of External Affairs to project a positive image of Canadian culture to other countries and encourage cordial relations between like-minded nations.

In the case of the 1951 São Paulo Bienal, as Caroline A. Jones asserts, the exhibition was founded partly to reinforce Brazil’s connection to liberal democracy amid the ideologically polarized atmosphere of the Cold War. I argue that Canadian participation was initially attractive to External Affairs for the opportunity it provided to cultivate positive relationships with Latin America, as well any tendencies within the region towards the liberal values of open cultural exchange. While the NGC was initially reluctant to participate, by the close of the 1st Bienal, the Gallery began to appear more sympathetic to External Affairs’ goals.

The 1952 Venice Biennale, in contrast, was immensely attractive to the NGC. The Gallery capitalized on the opportunity to reinforce its definition of Canadian art, and to situate itself as a key arbiter of Canadian culture, both domestically and internationally. Indeed, its artist selection of well-established Canadian artists, namely Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge

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Roberts, and Alfred Pellan, indicates the Gallery’s adherence to narratives of Canadian art that it had established and reinforced itself earlier throughout the early twentieth century.

By the 1957 São Paulo Bienal, the NGC seemed even more willing to acquiesce to the wishes of External Affairs. Of an unusually broad four-part contribution, the NGC curated only the contemporary art section, and relinquished control of the architecture, theatre, and Inuit sculpture sections to other Canadian cultural or government institutions. Ultimately I contend that the Canadian contribution to the 1957 São Paulo aligned largely to External Affairs’ goals, as it appeared to be designed to reinforce a broadly positive view of Canadian culture and to encourage cultural diplomacy with Latin American nations.

I situate the 1958 Venice Biennale, and the opening of the Canadian pavilion, as Canada’s symbolic “coming of age” within postwar biennial culture. The 1958 Biennale was the peak of NGC enthusiasm for international biennials within the twentieth century – an enthusiasm that emerged from, and dovetailed with, the emphasis on cultural nationalism spurred by the Massey Commission. Shortly after the 1952 Biennale, the NGC began to campaign tirelessly to construct a Canadian pavilion on Biennale grounds, which it situated as a key factor in the international reception of Canadian art, and, by extension, a factor in Canada’s political status as well. The Gallery’s campaign was successful, as plans began in earnest for the pavilion’s construction in 1956. The NGC’s evident lack of design input and lack of knowledge of the structure and capacity of the pavilion until its completion suggests that the mere presence of a pavilion on the Biennale grounds was more important to the Gallery than the pavilion itself. The NGC’s drive to open the pavilion and throw a lavish reception resulted in a measure of conflict with External Affairs, who appeared to strongly disapprove of the NGC’s desire to extend beyond their means in regards to the reception.
Through this comparative analysis of Canadian participation in the Venice and São Paulo biennials, I contend that international biennials served as sites for the construction and reinforcement of cultural nationalist narratives, and for cultural diplomacy, for both the NGC and External Affairs. Ultimately, the study of Canadian participation in international biennials in the postwar era underscores the influence of the Massey Commission’s recommendations, despite its vagueness; the intersection of nationalism and internationalism in the goals of the Massey Commission, the NGC’s role as a major arbiter of Canadian culture, its complex relationship with the Department of External Affairs, both institutions’ connection and adherence to values associated with liberalism, and the significance of liberalism to Canadian cultural nationalism in the postwar period more generally.

Beyond the temporal and theoretical scope of this thesis, much ground remains to be covered within the study of Canadian participation in international biennials. My study, for example, might be extended in examination of the increasingly complicated relationship between the NGC and External Affairs through the 1960s and early 1970s, which continued to involve their respective stances on the projection of Canadian culture, as well as their shared relationship to liberalism. By 1971, the National Gallery’s Director of International Exhibitions, Joanna Woods Marsden had suggested that Canada decline its biannual invitation to participate in the São Paulo Bienal. Correspondence between senior staff at the NGC suggests that its reasons for abstaining were simultaneously a concern for the military dictatorship in place in Brazil at the time and a sense that participation in international biennials generally, including the Venice Biennale was less valuable to the Gallery than it had been in the past.

Additionally, I would argue that my examination of the earliest years of Canadian participation in international biennials may be used to contextualize a study of the institutional
politics entangled in the most recent instances of Canadian participation in the Venice Biennale. While a peer-reviewed committee of curators determined which institution and which artist would represent Canada at the Biennale from 1988 to 2009, the inconsistent nature of this decentralized model, in combination with a host of funding issues, resulted in the return of control over Canadian presence at the Biennale to the NGC in 2011, where it remains as of 2013. Ultimately, there remains a gap in the existing literature to be filled with more critical examinations of Canadian participation in international biennials. I hope that my study serves as a very small, tentative first step in closing this gap.
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Appendix A

Works Included in the Canadian Section of the 1951 São Paulo Bienal\(^\text{165}\)

*All appendices are compiled of information gathered at the National Gallery of Canada Archives. Any errors in listed dates or titles reflect the archival records.

Leon Bellefleur, *Danse des Noyés*, 1950
Molly Lamb Bobak, *Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire*, 1951
Fritz Brandtner, *Town by the River*, n.d.
Paraskeva Clark, *Boats at Tadoussac*, 1946
Stanley Morel Cosgrove, *Landscape*, 1948
Albert Dumouchel, *Les Oriflammes de Bouts Pantelants*, 1950
Lionel Lemoine Fitzgerald, *Composition*, n.d.
Lillian Freiman, *Street Musicians*, n.d.
A.Y. Jackson, *Drywood Creek, Alberta*, n.d.
Arthur Lismer, *Dark Fire, Georgian Bay*, 1950
David Bruce Milne, *The Sled*, n.d.
David Bruce Milne, *Tower*, n.d.
William Abernethy Ogilvie, *Calm After Storm*, 1950

Carl Fellman Schaefer, *Burned Logs, Madawaska*, 1949
Carl Fellman Schaefer, *The Prime Minister’s Ruins, Kingshere*, 1947
Marion Dale Scott, *Field*, n.d.
Jacques de Tonnancour, *Femme Debout*, 1945
Appendix B

Works Included in the Canadian Section of the 1952 Venice Biennale

Emily Carr, *Blunden Harbour*, ca. 1930
Emily Carr, *Indian Church*, ca. 1930
David Milne, *Water Lilies*, 1928
David Milne, *Painting Place*, 1930
David Milne, *Autumn Woods*, ca. 1933
David Milne, *Winter Clouds*, 1937
David Milne, *First Snow, Bethlehem*, 1941
David Milne, *Rites of Autumn*, 1943
David Milne, *The Tower*, ca. 1947
David Milne, *Sled*, 1949
Goodridge Roberts, *Nude*, 1939
Goodridge Roberts, *Portrait*, 1939
Goodridge Roberts, *Landscape near Lake Orford*, 1945
Goodridge Roberts, *Still Life*, 1947
Alfred Pellan, *Désir au clair de la lune*, 1937
Alfred Pellan, *Femme à la perle*, 1938
Alfred Pellan, *Surprise académique*, ca. 1943
Alfred Pellan, *Les Iles de la Nuit*, ca. 1945

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Appendix C

Works included in the Contemporary Art portion of the Canadian Section of the 1957 São Paulo Bienal

*no dates provided in the list at the National Gallery of Canada Archives

Jean Paul Lemieux, *Express Maritime*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Lune d'Hiver*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Solitude Blanche*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Lac St. Pierre*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Francoise*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Ete des Sauvages*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *La Nuit Approche*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Solitude*
Jean Paul Lemieux, *Les Verts Paturages*

Takao Tanabe, *Landscape of an Interior Place #34*
Takao Tanabe, *Landscape of an Interior Place, On the Brink*
Takao Tanabe, *Interior Arrangement with Red Hills*
Takao Tanabe, *Tall Interior Landscape #2*
Takao Tanabe, *Study for Landscape, No. A*
Takao Tanabe, *Study for a Painting B*
Takao Tanabe, *Study for a Painting D*

Harold Town, *Monument to a Politician*
Harold Town, *Symbols of Games Past*
Harold Town, *Totem without Taboo*
Harold Town, *The Ruin of Oceanus*
Harold Town, *Monument in Profile*
Harold Town, *Poet's House Boat, No. 2*

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Harold Town, Winter Comes to the Garden of Hokusai
Harold Town, Dark Fetish
Harold Town, The Spectre as Spectator Near a Persian Wall
Harold Town, Monument to an Ancient General
Harold Town, To Walk Upside Down in a Lonely Memorial Square
Appendix D

Works Included in the Canadian Section of the 1958 Venice Biennale

James Wilson Morrice, Winter Roadway, Canada, ca. 1900
James Wilson Morrice, San Pietro di Castello, Venice, ca. 1904
James Wilson Morrice, Le Traineau, ca. 1905
James Wilson Morrice, Nude with Feather, ca. 1905
James Wilson Morrice, Canadian Square in Winter, ca. 1905-1906
James Wilson Morrice, Figure Study, ca. 1905-1908
James Wilson Morrice, Mountain Hill, Quebec, ca. 1906
James Wilson Morrice, The Race Course, Saint-Malo, ca. 1906
James Wilson Morrice, Autumn, Paris, ca. 1906
James Wilson Morrice, Ice Bridge Over the St. Lawrence, ca. 1907
James Wilson Morrice, The Ferry, Quebec, ca. 1908
James Wilson Morrice, Venice, Night, ca. 1908
James Wilson Morrice, The Terrace, Quebec, ca. 1910
James Wilson Morrice, The Beach, Le Pouldu, ca. 1901
James Wilson Morrice, Landscape, Tangiers, ca. 1912
James Wilson Morrice, Tangiers, The Beach, ca. 1912
James Wilson Morrice, Quebec Farm, ca. 1914
James Wilson Morrice, Circus, Santiago de Cuba, ca. 1915
James Wilson Morrice, In a Garden, the West Indies, ca. 1920

168 National Gallery of Canada Archives, National Gallery of Canada Fonds, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign,
James Wilson Morrice, *Bathing Cove, Trinidad*, ca. 1920-1921

James Wilson Morrice, *Landscape, Trinidad*, ca. 1920-1921

James Wilson Morrice, *The Port of Algiers*, 1922

Jacques de Tonnancour, *Sous-Bois*, 1944

Jacques de Tonnancour, *Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro*, 1945

Jacques de Tonnancour, *Black Table and Rubber Plant*, 1948

Jacques de Tonnancour, *The Owl*, 1954


Jacques de Tonnancour, *Jeune Fille en Vert*, 1956

Jacques de Tonnancour, *Winter Landscape*, 1957


Jacques de Tonnancour, *Late Afternoon, Winter*, 1958

Anne Kahane, *Queue*, 1954

Anne Kahane, *Snow-Storm*, 1956

Anne Kahane, *Bras Dessus – Bras Dessous*, 1956

Anne Kahane, *Delegation*, 1957

Anne Kahane, *Woman in Italy*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Dancing Pierrot*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Pierrot with Ball*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Pierrot with Circle*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Circus Person*, 1957
Jack Nichols, *Chevalier*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Pierrot and Dog*, 1957

Jack Nichols, *Primeval Landscape with Bird*, 1957