

— This is an old cv on Don! IN IT HE FIRST  
GOES AROUND ALL OF THE <sup>-1-</sup> GROUP INCLUDING OTHER  
ARTISTS, THIS DOCUMENT IS IMPORTANT  
DONALD FRASER

When I was living in Bracebridge, as a teenager, I didn't have any contact with art at all. I remember that I sent away for a book on Homer Watson--I thought his work was very strong, powerful. The scenes were a lot like the landscape we had around Bracebridge with storms and farm animals--pastoral scenes. I liked Horatio Walker too. This was the only art that I was familiar with, traditional European painters.

Later, when I came down to Toronto to attend the Ontario College of Art, I was exposed to the paintings of the Group of Seven. At that time their work did not appeal to me. All of the Group of Seven leaned heavily on design. I don't mean composition, but pattern and shapes. They broke up nature into coloured patterns and designs.

I studied design and lettering (that was my worst subject) under Franklin Carmichael, in the Commercial Course at the Art College. He was a letterer and a printmaker, working with lithography and etching. That type of work would require a very steady hand and lines were very important to him. He was a sort of commercial artist but he was a good teacher. His method of putting across an idea and transferring it into pictorial art was good. One time Carmichael set us a project to illustrate a poem. I took a poem from the Toronto Star (newspaper). It was a really corny one. So I did a drawing to go with it. Carmichael looked over my shoulder and snarled, "You're a sentimental cuss." He was pugnacious. He was much more critical of the boys in the class than of the gals. He had it in for the boys, especially. I wasn't the only one; he was so critical and harsh with Harold Town. Several students of his quit.

Another time Carmichael was looking through my sketch book at my drawings of old buildings and some of my family. He said, "You know, you could really draw if you put things down with greater definition! Your drawings are smudgy and soft. When you put down a line, put it down as hard and sharp as the edge of a razor blade." It made me shudder. But I was actually drawing in sort of a soft and misty way. I didn't think at the time that I was, but now when I look back, my old drawings seem soft and filmy. Now I realize he was right. I was putting things down in an indefinite way. He was one hundred percent right.

Certainly, later I appreciated Carmichael's criticisms. If he hadn't died so early, perhaps we would have become good friends. I remember his conviction when he put something down. I guess he felt very passionate about

Frank + Harold  
Carmichael in  
class with  
Don

it. Also, his definition in figure drawing. There wasn't any hesitancy in the line. I think Carmichael influenced me there; many people say the most interesting thing about my work is the strength and power of the line--no hesitancy in putting it down.

I remember doing a watercolour in Carmichael's class one day. I had couple of brushes standing in a tumbler of water. He said, "How would you like to be stuck in a glass of water on your head? Never do that again! It loosens the ferules!"

In my second year at the college, after studying under Carmichael for a while, I felt he was giving us a rough time. I decided to transfer to the Fine Arts Course where John Alfsen taught such subjects as figure drawing, portraiture, museum drawing and composition. Alfsen was a more traditional type of teacher. He liked the old masters. Reubens and Rembrandt were his heroes and his own drawing style was of the old master type. He didn't do much teaching orally. If anybody was having any trouble he'd say "Can I sit down with you?" and do a drawing and leave it as a demonstration. He used to say "Composition is one of the highest forms of art." According to him, I had it--good composition, that is. I got much more from John Alfsen than from anybody else on the staff at the college.

After I had graduated, when I was on the staff myself, I wrote a long tirade in the OCA newspaper against the Group of Seven. I completely condemned their work. That hard-edged design, patterned sort of stuff. They were designers. They all worked at Rapid, Grip, and Batten Commercial Art Studios. That's what they were - designers. I cut my own throat by publishing this diatribe against the "Hot Mush School", as their enemies called them. This was the time of the influx of DVA students (World War II veterans) to the Ontario College of Art. Because of the increase in the number of students, more teachers were hired, but they let me go. I would have been at OCA as long as I'd wanted if it wasn't for this condemnation that I had written. It just shows you how your taste changes. Now I like they work .

I didn't like Casson; he was more of a commercial artist. He studied under Carmichael and they were quite close in style, very similar. Their work was always sort of cold to me. They were designers really, in the true sense of the word.

The later works of Lawren Harris were as cold as ice. To me they looked very frigid. They were almost abstracts. That period doesn't appeal to me. The earlier work was warm. The paintings of Cabbagetown had interesting stucture and form.

*FIND THIS  
IF YOU  
CAN!*

As with most of the Group of Seven, J.E.H. McDonald's work was strong in design and colour, very strong in pattern. His style is much more linear than my style.

LeMoine Fitzgerald did interesting work - little dots of colour something like Seurat's - very careful and time-consuming. There is almost a static feeling in his work. No action, just form.

Edwin Holgate did mostly figures, but he was a good competent painter. He was not as well known as the others.

After he broke with the Group of Seven, Frank Johnston didn't paint with the bold line. He started using small brush strokes and his work was very sweet but he did this to sell paintings.

Arthur Lismer was one of the good ones. Very much like the others, he used bright colours to show the rhythmic lay of the land. He was known for his teaching. He had a genius for getting across ideas and stimulating people. He was a good painter. He did a lot of figure sketches of the other members of the Group. His work is very busy.

A.Y. Jackson said that he always put a red sleigh in his paintings--they were sure to sell that way. He was joking, of course. His paintings appealed to me less than some of the others. His work had very rhythmic brush strokes, but he got the character of the landscape and he had good feeling in his work. He travelled up north more than any artist in Canadian history--right up to the Arctic. He went everywhere. He was a very prolific painter. I used to see him down around the Art College quite a bit. He was a very friendly fellow. I used to say hello to him but I should have engaged him in conversation.

Fred Varley stood head and shoulders above the rest in his ability to draw and get form. He did very realistic portraits. He was good, it didn't matter what he painted - figures, portraits, landscapes. He had a great sense of colour, form and structure as well as a great command of the medium.

A painter who I admired was David Milne. Certainly his work is linear, I suppose textural, too. He worked mostly in monochrome, but when he did use colour it was very harmonious. He used pattern and design too. He used very simple subjects but didn't treat them in a literal way. He has a feeling of mood. His painting appeals to me because there is a great feeling of the landscape, not as broad as the Group of Seven but it has extreme sensitivity and perceptiveness.

Emily Carr's work is very dynamic, more so than any of the Group of Seven, even though she studied under them.

Why did I have a change of mind about the Group of Seven? It was a very gradual transition. I was following the old masters at the time, Flemish and Italian and so on. I started feeling less antagonistic towards the Group of Seven in the 1950's. In part, it was their subject matter and their treatment of it that I began to find appealing. It started with Tom Thomson's work. I could see the reality of it. I began to like the Group's treatment of the subject matter. When you look at nature, there is that sort of linear feeling, as in the rhythm and sweep of the pines and also in the rock. For some reason, before this time their work did not appeal to me. There was a definite turning point in my work when I started going up farther north to paint around the Georgian Bay area. The country up there was entirely different from that around Bracebridge: the pattern of the rock, the sweep of the water. There were much bigger, more imposing forms. I liked the country around Parry Sound. The French River was one of the best places. After painting up there, Varley's work (and Harris' early work) was much more meaningful to me. It was very appealing. Some of the landscape was so reminiscent of Group of Seven paintings, you'd swear that you were looking at one of their paintings. Tom Thomson's work was especially meaningful to me after this. I could see that pattern in nature that interested the Group of Seven and I had a greater sympathy with the Canadian landscape. I'd go out painting around Killarney country. It was very much like a Thomson or a McDonald painting. All I had to do was put down what was in front of me. Eventually, I saw what the Group of Seven were after - it was a truthful depiction of nature.

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*Alja. This is wrong. He just tells  
it like it is, honestly and now at  
the end. He finds himself.*

