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**WE STAND ON GUARD FOR THEE:
PROTECTING MYTHS OF NATION IN "CANVAS OF WAR"**

by

KIRSTY M. ROBERTSON

A thesis submitted to the Department of Art

In conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of dominant class interests within the multicultural narrative of "Canvas of War: Masterpieces from the Canadian War Museum," a major exhibition showcased at the Canadian Museum of Civilization between February 2000 and January 2001. I argue that the exhibition, together with several events surrounding its run, exploited a perceived "crisis" in public knowledge of Canadian history to reiterate an imagined need for a monolithic nationalist history – a history that rejects the idea of difference implicit in multiculturalism in favour of assimilationist narratives. Through an examination of the exhibition's narrative, installation, and immediate social context, this thesis explores the space within which multiculturalism as a Canadian government policy and as a nationally enshrined myth of nation-building intersects with dominant Anglo-Canadian histories.

for my mother

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The timing of *Canvas of War* couldn't be better to help break the growing gap in our knowledge of Canada at war – a result in part of so many misrepresentational contemporary history books and courses that distort national history for politically correct causes.

John D. Habron, *Globe and Mail*, 2000¹

Why are these paintings not on display permanently? As a young country we should certainly be more aware of our glorious beginnings, our past. Once a year on Remembrance Day ... is not enough – Vimy Ridge should be burned into the hearts and minds of every child in this country – we know so little of our heros [sic] let alone our distinguished painters...

Anonymous, "Canvas of War Comments Book," 2000²

The main theme [of "Canvas of War"] is that this exhibition represents Canada's cultural and military achievements in war time, an achievement that is not appreciated nationally.

Laura Brandon, "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, 1998³

Canada must be one of the few nations in the world, certainly one of the few industrialized states, that does not make an effort to teach its history positively and thoroughly to its young people. It must be one of the few political entities to overlook its own cultural traditions – the European civilization on which it is founded – on the grounds that they would systematically discriminate against those who come from other cultures. The effects of these policies on a generation of students are all around us as the twentieth century draws to a close.

Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, 1998⁴

These four comments relating to the exhibition, "Canvas of War: Masterpieces from the Canadian War Museum" – one from a reviewer, one from a visitor, one from the show's curator, and one from historian and former Director of the Canadian War Museum Jack Granatstein – suggest wide-spread fear that a certain narrative of Canadian history is threatened. This thesis examines how this perceived threat is expressed in the exhibition, "Canvas of War," as well as in the concurrent quest for a new Canadian war

¹ John D. Habron, "War Paint," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 11 Nov. 2000: D16-17.

² "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Comments Book 8," Vimy House, Ottawa.

³ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, Vimy House, Ottawa. "Canvas of War" is a photocopied brochure that was sent to art galleries throughout Canada as background material to the exhibition.

⁴ J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1998) xiv.

museum to house art produced for Canada during the two world wars. I argue that an imagined need for a monolithic nationalist history is answered in the exhibition through the construction of a myth of Canadian nationality that, while taking into account other histories, subsumes them into a dominant British-Canadian narrative of nation.

John Stratton and Ien Ang write: "[t]he Nation can assume a symbolic force precisely in so far as it is represented as a unity; yet national unity is always ultimately impossible precisely because it can only be represented as such through the suppression and repression, symbolic or otherwise, of difference."⁵ Thus, while Canada, as a country with an official cultural policy of multiculturalism, seemingly advances a national identity based on the acceptance of difference, in effect, when this celebration of difference is funneled into a single definition of "Canadian," it is revealed as an impossibility. Multiculturalism actually constructs a core group whose self-definition as normative "Canadian-Canadians" leaves everyone else to be defined as other, "hyphenated" Canadians.

Tony Bennett writes that, as a settler colony, Canada has had to look for models of nationhood and nationality "across competing forms of ethnicity and against a history of occupation and dispossession of original inhabitants."⁶ Eva Mackey argues that, most recently, Canada has used multiculturalism, and the development of a pluralist national identity, as a flexible strategy that permits the management of diverse populations while also allowing Canada to define and differentiate itself from other nations – most notably

⁵ John Stratton and Ien Ang, "Multicultural Imagined Communities: Cultural Difference and National Identity in Australia and the USA," *Continuum* 8 (1994): 124. See also Avtar Brah, "Difference, Diversity and Differentiation," *Race Culture and Difference*, ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage Publications, 1992) 124-158; and Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sneha Gunew, "Questions of Multiculturalism," *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993) 193-202; John Docker and Gerhard Fischer, eds., *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000).

⁶ Tony Bennett, Graeme Turner and Michael Volkering, "Introduction: Post Colonial Formations," *Culture and Policy* 6 (1994), <http://www.gu.edu.au/gwis/akccmp/6_1_Introduction.html#intro>, quoted in Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 13.

the United States.⁷ Mackey argues that Canada's national identity is not in the state of crisis perceived by those quoted at the opening of this paper, but rather, that the "reproduction of 'crisis' allows the nation to be a site of constantly regulated politics of identity."⁸ In other words, a perceived crisis allows dominant class narratives to be reiterated and strengthened at the expense of competing definitions of nationality.⁹

The "Canvas of War" exhibition is a case in point; it included several canvasses portraying women, First Nations and non-British ethnicities within the context of international conflict, as it is represented by the two world wars. The inclusion of these works, coupled with the exhibition's emphasis on the importance of the world wars to Canadian nationality, leads to the simultaneous presentation of narratives of Canada as a nation formed and strengthened during the particular historical moments of the First and Second World Wars, and of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural community. Because the exhibition claimed to depict the Canadian experience of war, all those portrayed in the show are placed within the exhibition's monolithic definition of Canadian identity. As a

⁷ An interesting comparison can also be made here to the way that Canada uses its participation in the two world wars to differentiate itself from the United States, thus making war an even more important component of Canadian self-definition. This pride in Canadian participation came about immediately after the First World War, eventually resulting in a special issue of *Macleans Magazine* in 1928 titled *The Truth About the War*. The magazine, which used statistics to counter any American claims to winning the war single-handedly, sold out immediately, and a further 100,000 copies were printed to meet the demand (Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* [Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997] 178-179.)

⁸ Mackey 13.

⁹ However, it should be noted that the fear of disintegrating narratives of Canadian history is not new. Examples from the twentieth century abound. The Canadian Citizenship Act, passed on 1 July, 1946 and put into effect on 1 January, 1947, is a case in point. Then cabinet minister Paul Martin stated, using much the same terminology that Granatstein uses today, "[F]or the national unity of Canada and for the future greatness of this country it is of the utmost importance that all of us new Canadians as well as old have a consciousness of common purpose and common interests as Canadians to be able to say with pride: "I am Canadian." While the gist of Martin's statements have recently been used primarily by a prominent Canadian beer company, government initiatives in citizenship education seeking to create a "common consciousness" are not new. Such initiatives were vigorously promoted in the wake of the Second World War, possibly in response to the civic crises brought about by conscientious objection, conscription, the internment of enemy aliens, and Canada's anti-Semitic immigration policy. The 1947 Citizenship Act defined Canada for the first time as a "nation of immigrants." (Mark Kristmanson, *Plateaus of Freedom: Nationality, Culture and State Security in Canada 1927-57*, PhD Thesis [Concordia University, Montreal, 1999] 120-122).

result, the present-day celebration of Canada as an inclusive and multicultural community is pushed back as far as the First World War. The two wars are thus used to represent the impossible symbolic unity of all Canadians, which ultimately leads to the undermining of a national narrative based on difference. Instead, a narrative of unity is advanced, and hence an interpretation of nationality of a single (hegemonic) class. In spite of the inclusion of several supposedly non-hegemonic groups, what the curators perceive to be a lack of knowledge of Canadian history on the part of the audience allows them to showcase an Anglo-centric collection and Anglo-centric narratives of war within the context of the supposed need for *all* Canadians to know *their* (monolithic national) history.

This inclusive/exclusive brand of history has many precedents within narratives of Canadian history. Historian Daniel Francis, for example, points out in his study, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History*, that myths surrounding the supposedly inevitable expansion of the Canadian nation westward are consistently couched in terms of the benevolence and tolerance shown by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police toward the Native populations.¹⁰ What is important within a Canadian context is that, while these myths obscure the often brutal reality of conquest, they do not deny the existence of First Nations and other marginalized peoples within the boundaries of the Canadian nation. Rather, non-British groups are often specifically used to demonstrate this supposed Canadian benevolence. As Mackey puts it "Aboriginal [and non-British ethnicities] are necessary players in nationalist myths: they are the colourful recipients of benevolence, the necessary 'others' who reflect white Canada's self-image of tolerance."¹¹ Thus, Canada's tolerance and sense of justice toward its minorities becomes a lynchpin in the creation of national identity – tolerance that can be seen as enacted in events such as the 1980 and 1995 Quebec Referenda, the installation of Haida artist Bill Reid's sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* outside the Canadian Embassy

¹⁰ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997) 69.

¹¹ Mackey 2.

in Washington D.C., as well as the "Canvas of War" exhibition and its wider social location.¹² This thesis explores the space within which multiculturalism as a government policy and as a nationally enshrined myth of nation-building intersects with the power-base of a dominant Anglo-Canadian culture.

Many studies have shown how such a power-base is reproduced within the cultural sphere – in particular within the museum. Over the last twenty-five years, for example, serious critical attention has been focused on the museum, resulting in studies that challenge the notion that institutions such as history museums and art galleries are "neutral filters through which material culture and contextual material are presented in an accurate and impartial way." Anthropologists, historians and art historians, among others, have addressed the question of how the museum assigns meaning to the objects in its collections.¹³ The conclusions reached by most of these scholars suggest that the conventional museum is a space within which, through the control of narratives, display techniques, and curatorial choices, the hegemony of a dominant class is maintained.¹⁴

In the introduction to Steven Lavine and Ivan Karp's 1991 collection, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Karp points out that, while the museum is often perceived to be neutral, in actuality it is a highly contested space.

¹² Mackey 2.

¹³ See for example Gordon Fyfe and Sharon MacDonald, eds., *Theorizing Museums* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1994); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Marcia Poiton, ed., *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Flora E. S. Kaplan, ed., *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The Role of Objects in National Identity* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1994); Tony Bennett, ed., *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995.)

¹⁴ Beyond this, authors such as Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach have shown how the architecture and space of the museum can reinforce the power of the state. Through an examination of the universal survey museum (in this case the Louvre), the authors demonstrate how the museum can realize the transcendental values that the state claims to embody, thus making concrete ideas of nationality. (See Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum" *Art History* 3 [December 1980]: 448-69. See also Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* [New York: Routledge, 1995].)

Although exhibitions may be morally neutral and unbiased in theory, they are never so in practice.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the supposed neutrality of the museum gives exhibitions and institutions power, as in the case of "Canvas of War" and the Canadian Museum Civilization, to reinforce certain narratives. The struggle, writes Karp, is not over what is represented, but over who is doing the representing. The exhibition can define who we are and who we are not.¹⁶ Karp and Lavine call for greater control by diverse populations over their presentation in the museum, exhibition designs that take into account multiple perspectives, and expanded expertise for the presentation of non-Western cultures within Western museums.¹⁷ They see these suggestions as the first step toward a solution that will maintain a vibrant museum culture that is accessible to more than one segment of the population.

The difficulty of implementing Karp and Lavine's seemingly simple suggestions, however, is made evident through an exploration of the competing elements involved in the construction of the museum's power.¹⁸ The 1994 anthology, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, edited by Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, focuses on the politics of museum exhibitions and display strategies, suggesting that "museums' multiple histories lie in the evolving interplay between basic notions of collecting, classifying, displaying, and, on the part of the public, receiving that underlie their institutional practices."¹⁹ Through a series of case studies, the authors of the essays in *Museum Culture* attempt to recover the hidden histories of museums – histories, Rogoff and Sherman claim, all museums have, but attempt to conceal.²⁰ The museum thus becomes "a field of interplay between the social histories of collecting, classifying,

¹⁵ Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991) 14.

¹⁶ Karp 15.

¹⁷ Karp and Lavine 6.

¹⁸ Sherman and Rogoff x.

¹⁹ Sherman and Rogoff x.

²⁰ Sherman and Rogoff x.

displaying, entertaining, and legitimating.²¹

Rogoff and Sherman also argue that recent critical work has outlined four groups that demonstrate museums' most pertinent relationships. First, the museum always bases its display strategy on a system of classifying objects, which in turn imposes order and meaning on them. Although many would like to believe that meaning is inherent in the object, classification always depends upon a constructed field, such as the "nation," "community" or "culture." Secondly, the museum generally institutionalizes the context of the object through the historical "epoch," "school" or "style." The third level of classification is that of the audience or public the museum claims to serve, while the way in which the audience receives the display and meanings offered constitutes a fourth level of classification. By representing these classification systems, museums perpetuate their construction.²²

While these classifications and studies are certainly of importance in order to understand the museum as a contested site, for the most part they are related to either the art gallery or the ethnographic museum. Institutions such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, which have more recently combined visual art with ethnographic objects and modern technology, are largely overlooked. Furthermore, while many authors deal generally with the museum in the Western world, most focus specifically on the United States or Britain. Such studies are helpful in an overview, but sufficient attention has not been paid to the special context created in a country where multiculturalism as official government policy influences many exhibitions.

Perhaps of more pertinence to this study are the essays in Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe's volume, *Theorizing Museums*, several of which focus on Canadian exhibitions, and many of which deal with museums that have moved beyond an

²¹ Sherman and Rogoff x.

²² Sherman and Rogoff xi.

art/ethnography dichotomy.²³ While Macdonald and Fyfe's volume, along with the many studies dealing with museum representation of non-Western artefacts, are informative and important, explorations of the other side of this question – how the dominant class represents itself within multicultural narratives – are largely lacking from the literature.²⁴ This study addresses this neglected area, and, in so doing, contributes to an emerging field of studies of "whiteness" by demonstrating how a dominant class retains power through the use of apparently inclusive narratives.²⁵

Within this context, the use of the historical moments of the two world wars as essential components in the formation of Canadian nationhood has been seen to be imperative to dominant narratives of Canadian history. In recent years war – most

²³ See Sharon Macdonald, "Theorizing Museums, an Introduction," in MacDonald and Fyfe 1-20; and Henrietta Riegel "Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference," in the same volume, which examine the exhibitions "Into the Heart of Africa" and "Fluffs and Feathers" at the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto, and at the Woodlands Cultural Centre, in Brantford, respectively.

²⁴ See for example James Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Press, 1991) 212-254; Deborah Doxtator, "The Implications of Canadian Nationalism for Aboriginal Cultural Autonomy," *Curatorship: Indigenous Perspectives in Post-Colonial Societies: Proceedings* (Ottawa and Calgary: Canadian Museum of Civilization, University of Victoria and the Commonwealth Association of Museums, 1994) 56-76; Gerald McMaster, "Towards an Aboriginal Art History," in *Native Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed., W. Jackson Rushing (New York: Routledge, 1999) 81-96; Carol Tator, Frances Henry and Winston Mattis, eds., *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Anne Whitelaw, "Land Spirit Power: First Nations Cultural Production and Canadian Nationhood," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 12 (Fall 1995): 31-47.

²⁵ See for example Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso, 1994); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991); David R. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1994); T. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985): 573-576. The study of "white Canadianess" does not presuppose that all Canadians belong within a single definition of a monolithic Canadian nationality. Nor does it attempt the problematic task of turning a white class into an "other" in order to study it. Rather a study of "whiteness" attempts to uncover the normative discourses that are often ignored in society. As Lears points out, this type of study is often difficult because the line between dominant and subordinate culture is permeable, marginalized cultures may continue to thrive beyond the boundaries of received opinion, subordinate groups can identify with dominant culture even as they challenge it, and "historians like to believe in the autonomy and vitality of subordinate cultures," and do not like to examine "a kind of half-conscious complicity in ... victimization" (Lears 573-576).

particularly the First World War – has been foregrounded in stories of the formation of the Canadian nation, and is generally described in terms of Canadians fighting for a common goal. Many of the fictional and academic books, newspaper articles, television series and movies that present the war as such, use an assimilationist narrative to define Canada – situating war as a point where all Canadians, no matter what their background, fought together for the common cause of national freedom.²⁶ Popular books such as Pierre Berton's *Vimy* and Jack Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History?* perpetuate this myth.²⁷ By contrast, a small but growing body of literature, much of it found in unpublished MA and PhD theses, provides extensively researched accounts of the formation of an exclusive nationalism in Canada in the years during and after the First World War.²⁸ Mediating between these is Jonathan Vance's book, *Death So Noble*, in which he argues that it was only after the impact of the Great War had begun to dissipate that myths of war were reinvigorated within an exclusive, Anglo-male narrative. An earlier myth of the First World War as a necessary and glorious conflict against a barbarous enemy was widely accepted and was the creation of average Canadians. As Vance puts it,

The memory of war was not simply a creation of Anglo-Canadian intellectuals, political leaders, social elites, and renowned members of the literati. Though these groups undoubtedly played a significant role in the

²⁶ For fictional accounts see Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2000); Jack Hodgins, *Broken Ground* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998); Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001). For academic books see Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 1993); Bill Freeman and Richard Neilson, *Far From Home* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1999); Daniel G. Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987); J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *Marching to Armageddon* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989). For newspaper articles see the coverage of the Return of the Unknown Soldier in May 2000 including Ron Corbett, "Canada's Lost Son 'Lost No More': Thousands Pay Tribute to Unknown Soldier," *Ottawa Citizen* 29 May 2000: A1, A2. and Richard Foot, "Unknown Soldier is Home Forever," *National Post* (Toronto) 29 May 2000: A1, A4. For television series and movies see *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story* (Sullivan Entertainment, 1999) and the *Canada at War* series (National Film Board of Canada, 1999).

²⁷ Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); Granatstein 1998.

²⁸ See for example Annabel Fay Hanson, "The Pantheon on Nepean Point?: The Canadian War Memorials Collection in Historical Context," MA Thesis (Queen's University, Kingston, 2000); Kristina Huneault, "Heroes of a Different Sort: Representations of Women at Work in Canadian Art of the First World War," MA Thesis (Concordia University, Montreal, 1994); Dave Inglis, "Vimy Ridge 1917-1992: A Canadian Myth Over 75 Years," MA Thesis (Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, 1995); Vance 1997.

propagation of the myth, it would never have caught on without active and enthusiastic support elsewhere in the Canadian mosaic. It is this diversity of authorship that makes the memory of war so fascinating. It crosses boundaries of gender, class, religion, ethnicity, and region....²⁹

However, through the years of the Depression and the Second World War, this myth of war came to be mobilized increasingly in terms of nation and nationality, and was frequently suggested as an exemplary assimilationist narrative for immigrant Canadians. The original populist and multicultural basis of the myth of war was forgotten.³⁰ Instead, according to Vance, the war became a tool that could be used to weld newcomers together. He writes that the general feeling was that "if new Canadians, members of the First Nations, English, and French could simply focus on the positive aspects of the war and agree to forget the negative, then the country was destined for greatness. Provincial jealousies," he continues, "ethnic antipathies, even the mutual resentments harboured by Canada's founding races – all would crumble to dust under the unifying influence of the myth of the war."³¹ Strangely, much of the writing surrounding the supposedly inclusive exhibition, "Canvas of War," focuses not on the earlier myth, but instead mobilizes the wars within an assimilationist narrative, echoing Jack Granatstein's recommendations in his 1998 book *Who Killed Canadian History?*. Granatstein writes,

The aim of every Canadian and all levels of government should be to welcome immigrants and to turn them into Canadian citizens as quickly as possible ... They must ... come to understand that if they wish to honour the Old Country's ways and practices, they must do it themselves ... not one cent of federal, provincial, or municipal government money should be

²⁹ Vance 7.

³⁰ Vance 11.

³¹ Vance 11.

devoted to fostering the retention of their cultures.²²

This, according to Granatstein is the only way to maintain Canada as a strong country. While his prescription for Canada may sound extreme, Granatstein's continued influence, the book's position on the Canadian best-seller list, and the quotes at the opening of this paper demonstrate that many Canadians feel similar anxieties about a narrative of Canadian history built on plurality. The space of "Canvas of War," then, occupies a difficult position between competing narratives of nation – both those from the war years and those of today. It is this situation that is explored in the chapters that follow.

²² Granatstein 85. Granatstein was director of the Canadian War Museum during the planning and opening of "Canvas of War." He left the War Museum in 2000 to pursue other interests, most notably to write a book on the Canadian Armed Forces, and to sit as a member on several boards, including that of Historica, a foundation established to ensure the vitality of Canadian history. Backed by Canadian big business interests such as Seagrams, Imasco, Royal Bank, Toronto Dominion Bank, McCain, Weston, McClelland & Stewart, CanWest Global and Maritime Broadcasting, Historica was established in answer to many of the anxieties aroused by Granatstein in his 1998 book, and his specific request that a "Centre for Canadian History" be established (Granatstein 142). See also the Historica website: <www.historica.ca>; Paul Webster, "Who Stole Canadian History?," *This Magazine* (March/April 2000): 29-31; Charlie Gillis, "Restoring the Signs of Life," *National Post* (Toronto) 15 Mar. 2000: A3.

Chapter 2

The Exhibition

Liberal humanism is fond of imagining an inner space within the human subject where he or she is most significantly free. A sophisticated liberal humanist will not of course deny that human subjects are externally or even internally afflicted by all kinds of grievous determinants and constraints; it is just that what these forces seek to determine and constrain is some transcendental core of inner freedom. The bad news ... is that this 'inner space' is actually where we are least free. If we were simply hedged round with oppressive powers, we would no doubt have a reasonable chance of putting up some active resistance to them. But no dominant political order is likely to survive very long if it does not intensively colonize the space of subjectivity itself.... Power succeeds by persuading us to desire and collude with it.

Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory*

The exhibition, "Canvas of War," showcased the Canadian War Museum's art collection – a collection historian J.L. Granatstein describes as a "national treasure" that has been hidden from view.² The canvasses and sculptures in the show were drawn primarily from the Canadian War Memorials Fund collection (CWMF), compiled during the years 1914-1918, and the Canadian War Records Collection (CWRC), amassed during the years 1939-1945, with one "epilogue" canvas from the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist Program (CAFCAAP) of 1968-1995, showing Canadian peacekeepers in Croatia.³ The main exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, which ran from February 2000 to January 2001, was supported by a website,⁴ as well as by two parallel exhibitions: "Battle Lines" at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinberg, which was made up of smaller canvasses by Canadian artists, and "Colours of War," a travelling show of works on

¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 36-37.

² Dean Oliver and Laura Brandon, *Canvas of War: Painting the Canadian Experience 1914-1945* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2000) xii.

³ Laura Brandon, "Canada's War Art," in *Canadian War Museum Dispatches* 10 (January 2000): 1.

⁴ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Book 16," Vimy House, Ottawa; see also "Canvas of War" website, <<http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/canvas/cwint01e.html>>.

paper.⁵

According to the exhibition proposal drawn up in 1998 by Canadian War Museum curator Laura Brandon, "Canvas of War" was intended to present two interrelated themes: art as a record of war, and war as a catalyst for art – separate themes running parallel but tightly interconnected.⁶ The goals for "Canvas of War" were, not surprisingly, to create "an appreciation of the CWM's war art collection" and "to foster an understanding of the role Canadians played in the two world wars."⁷ Visitors were expected to leave the exhibition knowing that the War Museum has what Brandon describes as a "superb" collection of war art, that Canadians played significant roles in both world wars, that art was used to document and commemorate both wars, and that the experience of war transformed the artists and their art. Furthermore, visitors were expected to feel "awed by the quality, scale, and scope of the works," "proud" of what Canadians had accomplished, and "moved by the powerful portrayal" of Canada's war experience.⁸

The "Canvas of War" display was arranged in a rectangle, divided into three sections, surrounding a central room called the "Treasures Gallery" (fig. 1). In all the sections, the canvasses were set against alternating deep-red, dark-violet, and teal walls, and were picked out from the dim surroundings with boutique lighting. Polish

⁵ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Book 2," Vimy House, Ottawa. Exhibitions of F.H. Varley's First World War art at the Varley Museum in Unionville, Ontario; an online exhibition of Mary Rider Hamilton's war art at the National Archives, and a display of the National Gallery's CWMF collection were shown concurrently with "Canvas of War," but were not directly connected. None of these smaller exhibitions are discussed in this paper.

⁶ As curator of the Canadian War Museum's art collections, Laura Brandon is credited as the curator of "Canvas of War." The "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files clearly demonstrate that she was in charge of organizing the exhibition, choosing the canvasses, and approving decisions made by other curatorial team members. However, "Canvas of War" was organized by a curatorial team, including Pam Cross, Interpretive Planner; Tony Glen, Project Manager; Ian Gergory, Exhibition Design; Melanie Kwong, Senior Communications Manager, and Dr. Roger Sarty, Director of Historical Research and Exhibit Development. ("Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, Vimy House, Ottawa; "Canvas of War" website, <<http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/canvas/cwb3e.html>>).

⁷ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa.

⁸ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa.

composer Henryk Górecki's somber music, and commentary from two video productions made for the show could be heard throughout. After passing through the entrance to the exhibition, visitors were meant to proceed to the central "Treasures Gallery," which contained the two largest canvasses: *The Second Battle of Ypres* (1917, fig. 2) and *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* (1919, fig. 3), both by British artist Richard Jack, and both over six meters long and three meters high. The central room also contained several canvasses from both the First and Second World Wars and one of Canadian sculptor Walter Allward's plaster models for the Canadian monument at Vimy Ridge. According to Brandon, the paintings and sculptures chosen for the "Treasures Gallery," "highlight... the sheer power and importance of the war art collection as a record of Canada's wartime experience."⁹

After leaving the "Treasures Gallery," a door led visitors into the main exhibition, where they followed the roughly chronological arrangement of the paintings around the rectangular exhibition space in a counter-clockwise direction, passing through a First and a Second World War section, and ending with William MacDonnell's 1994 epilogue canvas *Sappers Clearing a Deadfall* (fig. 4). Due in part to the much larger size of the CWMF canvasses (including Richard Jack's two paintings in the "Treasures Gallery"), the First World War dominated the exhibition, taking about two-thirds of the display space.

The start of the First and Second World War sections were each marked with a small glass case containing war artefacts (such as barbed wire and shell casings), and a panel mounted on the wall with a short historical outline of Canadian military contributions to each war effort. Each text panel, as well as the exterior wall of the exhibition, was designed to suggest a broken box, consisting of a square or rectangle split through the middle by a jagged line. The design, according to Brandon, "[was] a multiple allusion to the nature of war – [of] two sides, division, damage, firepower, [and] classic thunderbolts ... – the idea of the surface activity of war and then what is underneath that.... The basic idea was to have something broken in the design to reflect

⁹ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa.

the nature of the subject-matter.”¹⁰

In the World War One section, paintings were divided between those done primarily by British artists, which “reveal[ed] the art as an important record of major events and experiences,” and a smaller number painted by Canadian artists, which underlined “the importance of this work for the development of Canadian art.”¹¹ Within this latter division, the canvasses were separated thematically and chronologically, with groupings focusing on the art of the Group of Seven, on women’s contributions to the war effort, on the importance of Christianity in the Great War, and on battle scenes. By highlighting the importance of an emergent national art, the CWMF collection was placed within the context of a colony-to-nation narrative of Canada as a British dominion brought to maturity as a nation on the battlefields of France and Flanders. The CWRC canvasses in the Second World War section, painted almost entirely by Canadian artists, were also arranged chronologically, but were noticeably smaller and more uniform in execution than those of the First World War. This time there was less focus on the work of the Group of Seven, and several new Canadian artists, including Alex Colville, Lawren P. Harris (son of Group of Seven member Lawren Harris), Charles Comfort and Molly Lamb Bobak were highlighted. Thematic groupings again included women’s work, as well as the home front, and the war at sea.

Throughout the exhibition, the curatorial team responsible for the show included numerous works depicting the contributions to both war efforts of women, First Nations, and non-British ethnicities. From the Canadian War Museum’s collection of more than 13,000 war artefacts, paintings and sculptures, less than 100 canvasses and statues were chosen, favouring works, it seems, that could be used to construct an inclusive narrative of Canada as it evolved from colony to nation. Working against the War Museum’s collection, which has an overwhelming number of objects depicting the experiences of male British-Canadians, the curatorial team’s selections presented a

¹⁰ Laura Brandon, letter to the author, 22 Feb. 2001.

¹¹ “Canvas of War” Exhibition Files, “Exhibition Concept, Book 1,” Vimy House, Ottawa.

narrative more reflective of the federal government's current policy of multiculturalism than of the collection's emphasis on the British-Canadian experience of war.¹² Thus, it first appears that the curatorial team attempted to construct an inclusive narrative of Canadian war history – in other words, the type of narrative John Habron dismisses as “politically correct” in his review of the show and catalogue.¹³ As Eva Mackey has noted, however, by including a multicultural array of faces within the works, and by conflating the experiences of other ethnicities and of women with those of Anglo-male-Canadians, dominant narratives are brought to the forefront.¹⁴ In this manner, an inclusive narrative works to exclude competing narratives of non-hegemonic experiences of war. In turn, a dominant-class interpretation of war can be used today to “teach” Canadians “their” history, thereby establishing it as the normative narrative of Canadian history against which other narratives must compete.

For this reason, the exhibition's focus on a supposedly inclusive narrative is never specifically mentioned. In other words, it is not necessary to outline the hegemonic narrative of Canadian history, while the inclusion of otherwise marginalized peoples suggests sensitivity to what could be seen as “special interest groups.” The supposedly inclusive narrative of the exhibition, to use art historian Lynda Jessup's words, “disguises the continued hegemony of Anglo-Canadian culture by rendering it invisible.”¹⁵ The result is that, while the curatorial team indicated sensitivity to contemporary social interest in multiculturalism in their representation of the past, what they actually

¹² The overwhelming number of paintings and objects depicting the British-Canadian experience are recorded in R. F. Wodehouse, *Checklist of the War Collections* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970). From a collection of approximately 5,000 paintings and sculptures in the CWMF collection and CWRC there are less than 250 works specifically concerned with women's or non-British participation in both wars. Furthermore, approximately 235 of these works were done by five artists (Florence Wyle, Frances Loring, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, Paraskeva Clark, and Molly Lamb Bobak), none of whom could be over-represented in the exhibition.

¹³ John D. Habron, “War Paint,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 11 Nov. 2000: D16-17.

¹⁴ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 2.

¹⁵ Lynda Jessup, “Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven,” in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 144.

reproduced was a hegemonic narrative. It is for this reason that John Habron is highly critical of "politically correct" histories that he sees overtaking the school system, but is generally uncritical in his perception of the exhibition.¹⁶ He apparently overlooks what he does not wish to acknowledge, and finds nothing to challenge his perception that Canada's war history is essential to its stance as a united nation.

Aside from the short historical panels mounted beside the artefact cases, "Canvas of War" relied primarily on the impact of the art work and installation design, rather than on historical analysis, to convey the show's intended meanings. Thus, it is not surprising that Brandon's "Canvas of War" proposal states that "the artworks themselves are the primary medium for the communication of the exhibition's messages."¹⁷ Labels beside the paintings normally introduced the painter and outlined his/her participation in the CWMF or CWRC, gave descriptions of the specific event(s) pictured, and, occasionally, supported the descriptions with anecdotal quotes, poems, diary entries or reminiscences. Although each thematic segment of the exhibition was accompanied by a text panel, and each painting or sculpture was accompanied by a label, there was no detailed analysis of either war, and many controversial issues, such as Japanese and "enemy-alien" internment camps, Canada's racist refusal to accept Jewish refugees, Canadian prisoners of war in Hong Kong, or French-Canadian anger over conscription, were avoided altogether.

In deciding to allow the art works to "speak for themselves," the exhibition team was working against the results of a front-end evaluation, conducted in March 1998, which found that a significant number of people were more interested in historic than

¹⁶ Habron D16-17.

¹⁷ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa.

aesthetic analysis.¹⁶ While the curatorial team did not specifically offer aesthetic analysis, it was clearly assumed that the display of the canvasses, combined with short commentaries, would be sufficient to attain the exhibition goals of stimulating pride, awe, and interest in the collection. Avoiding extensive historic analysis and relying primarily on visual impact also allowed the curatorial team to evade the now well-worn debate between advocates of traditional and modern art that had arisen in earlier showings of the collections. In this way, "Canvas of War" differed greatly from the initial exhibitions of these works in the immediate post-war years, when there were complaints regarding the so-called modern canvasses, and most criticism focused entirely on the aesthetic impact of the works. Barker Fairley's critique of the 1919 Canadian War Memorial's Fund Exhibition in Toronto is indicative of how perception of the work has changed. His analysis of F.H. Varley's painting *For What?* (fig. 5), for example, deals with "the handling of its wet foreground which for sheer paint-quality could hardly be beaten...." Fairley is totally uninterested in the subject matter of the painting, instead noting that "the slightest error of sentiment in *For What?* and the tactful arrangement of figure, cart and skyline

¹⁶ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa. It should be noted, however, that the catalogue produced for the exhibition, written by Laura Brandon and historian Dean Oliver and introduced by J.L. Granatstein, was primarily historical in approach. Like the exhibition, the catalogue includes many illustrations of women, First Nations, Black- and Chinese-Canadian soldiers and workers, again advancing a narrative perhaps more reflective of the federal government's current policy of multiculturalism than of the collection's emphasis on the British-Canadian experience of war. However, the text of the catalogue, while reflecting the summative evaluation's findings of an interest in historical interpretation, strongly emphasizes the experience of white, male, Anglo-Canadian soldiers. In general, the experiences of others shown in the illustrations are not mentioned in the text, thus undermining any attempt at inclusivity that the use of these paintings might suggest. Without additional commentary the visual representations of others are hence assimilated into an Anglo-centric account of the Canadian wartime experience. See Laura Brandon and Dean Oliver, *Canvas of War: Painting and the Canadian Experience 1914-1945* (Toronto and Ottawa: Douglas and McIntyre, Canadian War Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation, 2000).

might have suffered a fatal displacement...."¹⁹ The dead soldiers in a cart about to be dumped in a common grave, which has been interpreted in recent years as a powerful protest against war, is for Fairley little more than a compositional device.²⁰

Within "Canvas of War," *For What?* is mobilized within an anti-war context, and provides an excellent example of how a narrative can be forwarded. Although sponsored by the War Museum, "Canvas of War" was not overtly pro-military. In fact, the exhibition contained several canvasses which could easily be read as anti-war, among them *For What?*, Maurice Cullen's *Dead Horse and Rider in a Trench* (fig. 6) and Jack Nichols's *Drowning Sailor* (fig. 7). Taken together with the somber music and dim lighting in the show, they seemed to mitigate against a glorified interpretation of war. This was reinforced for viewers by the epilogue canvas showing Canadian peacekeepers in Croatia, which highlighted Canada's post-war self-image as a peace-loving and peace-keeping country.²¹ In the case of *For What?*, the curatorial team were able to complement the somber music and dim lighting with an excerpt from a letter from Varley to his wife. He wrote,

¹⁹ Barker Fairley, "At the Art Gallery – The Canadian Section of the War Pictures," *The Rebel* (Dec. 1919): 123. For other examples see "Hon. H.S. Beland Officially Opens Exhibit War Memorials," *Ottawa Citizen* 6 Jan 1923: 5; "Painted Record Canada at War to be Exhibited," *Ottawa Evening Journal* 16 Jan 1924: 1-2; "Canadian War Memorials Depict Most Vital and Trying Period of the History of the Dominion," *Ottawa Journal* 5 Jan 1923: 7; "War Memorials Recall Horrors and Brave Deeds," *Ottawa Journal* 6 Jan 1923: 9; "War's Last Phase Shown in Paint," *Montreal Gazette* 30 Sep. 1920: 5; "War Memorials Exhibit at the Art Gallery," *Montreal Daily Star* 28 Sep. 1920: 8; Hector Charlesworth, "Reflections," *Saturday Night* (Sep. 18, 1920): 2.

²⁰ Brandon and Oliver 5; Charles Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995) 65-66.

²¹ Author Will Ferguson writes that, "Peacekeeping is the ultimate Canadian endeavour. Not just because it is noble and selfless and nice, but because it is such a *non*solution. Rather than confront a problem head on, you diffuse it by creating separate solitudes, by living parallel lives, by maintaining duality and by limiting contact. Sound familiar? It should. It is the very blueprint of our nation" (Will Ferguson, *Why I Hate Canadians* [Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997] 82). While Ferguson pokes fun at such a self-definition, the acceptance of the vision of Canada as a peaceful and peace-keeping country is pervasive enough that J.L. Granatstein felt it necessary to comment that the emphasis on teaching students about peacekeepers has detracted from teaching about war in the school system (Granatstein 125-127).

You in Canada ... cannot realize at all what war is like. You must see it and live it. You must see the barren deserts war has made of once fertile country ... see the turned-up graves, see the dead on the field, freakishly mutilated – headless, legless, stomachless ... see your own countrymen, unidentified, thrown into a cart, their coats over them, boys digging a grave in a land of yellow slimy mud and green pools of water under a weeping sky....²²

The powerful combination of music, lighting, canvas and quotation made for an appropriately anti-war interpretation. However, it should be noted that Varley vacillated between loving and hating the war. The painting was named "For What?" not in order to question the war effort, but because Varley, asking his friend for a title to a painting, received the reply "For what?". The title stuck.²³

The front-end evaluation that revealed public interest in historical analysis also found that the level of interest in the proposed exhibition rose with the maturity of the visitor. While many of the 300 visitors questioned felt that the topic of the exhibition was important and should be presented to older children, most felt that it would be of interest primarily to a more mature, Anglophone cohort. Knowing this, the curatorial team specifically addressed the "ergonomic and intellectual needs of this [older] audience."²⁴

Whether the fact that the interests of an older English-Canadian audience were addressed, or whether the topic of the exhibition simply attracted this demographic, a summative evaluation study conducted by the Canadian Museum of Civilization demonstrated that the results predicted by the front-end evaluation were correct. The museum collected 282 completed questionnaires from visitors who knew that they would be filling out a form at the end of the exhibition. Echoing the results of the front-end evaluation, 62% stated that they had been drawn to the exhibition because of an interest in history, while an additional 45% also stated that the theme of the exhibition was interesting, and 42% also went in because of an interest in art. The survey found that

²² "Canvas of War" Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

²³ Maria Tippett, *Stormy Weather: F.H. Varley, A Biography* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998) 109.

²⁴ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Exhibition Concept, Book 1," Vimy House, Ottawa.

over three quarters of the respondents were English speaking, about 15% higher than is normally seen at the Museum of Civilization. There were slightly more females than males (54% compared to 46%), which was only approximately 3% higher than normal, but very high for exhibitions associated with the War Museum. The average age, at 45, was much higher than normal for the Museum of Civilization, with nearly 37% of visitors falling in the 41 to 60 age-range. Over half the visitors had been to the Museum before – the percentage, at 54%, being 15% higher than average – and almost one quarter had been there within the past year. Furthermore, most of the respondents stated that they went to museums at least one to three times per year. When asked why they had visited the exhibition, 48% of respondents said they had simply come to visit the museum, but a very high number – 38% – stated that they had specifically come to see “Canvas of War.”²⁵

The summative evaluation questionnaire also asked “what would you say is the main purpose of this exhibition?” Divided thematically, 36% felt that the purpose was to display the sacrifice/suffering/horrors and destruction of war; 15% felt that the purpose was to display Canada’s involvement in, and the importance of Canada in war; 12% felt that it was to display the realism of war; and 11% felt that it was to display the history of war in general and to display the war collection.²⁶

Finally, of those under the age of thirty, over half had come to see something else at the Museum of Civilization, with a very small number (one fifth) coming specifically to see “Canvas of War.” According to the survey “expectations were met by this age group but other evaluations tended to be in the mid-range. They were not as enthusiastic about this exhibition as other groups.” Similarly, Francophones gave only mediocre to medium evaluations of the exhibition. Given that the audience was constructed as an older, Anglophone one, it is not surprising that visitors from this cohort ranked the exhibition most highly. The authors of the evaluation came to the predictable conclusion that “the more experienced a visitor was with museums, the more they liked the exhibition.”

²⁵ “Canvas of War” Exhibition Files, “Summative Evaluation Study,” Vimy House, Ottawa.

²⁶ “Canvas of War” Exhibition Files, “Summative Evaluation Study,” Vimy House, Ottawa.

Interestingly, several respondents actually called for more works by/of women and visible minorities.²⁷

That the audience for "Canvas of War" turned out to be older, primarily Anglophone, and often specifically interested in seeing the war art exhibition, suggests not only that the exhibition's subject matter was attractive to this audience, but also that the curatorial team successfully focussed on the "ergonomic and intellectual needs" of this group, even while billing the exhibition to the general public. Indeed, the overwhelming number of comments collected during the exhibition were in English, many of them written by older visitors, specifically stating that they had either lived through the Second World War, or knew someone who had fought in one of the wars.²⁸ Most of these comments were exceedingly positive; many people demanded that the exhibition be put on permanent display, reflecting both their pride in the struggles of Canadian soldiers and artists, and the emotionality of the exhibit.²⁹ Most negative comments were from bored school children or focussed on perceived problems with the exhibition display (lighting, alarms). If anything, the exhibition was seen as not Anglo-centric enough. For example, one visitor commented, "Canadians bled in France for what? So that De Gaulle could come back later to say 'Vive La Quebec libre!'" A more typical response, however, was "Very very impressive. None of this art work should be hidden away. We need a special building to display this work and primarily to remember those who fought for our freedom."³⁰

Judging from the extensive comments collected during the exhibition, very few people challenged the narratives presented. In fact, the assimilative British-Canadian history housed within the seemingly inclusive framework of this show appears to have

²⁷ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Summative Evaluation Study," Vimy House, Ottawa.

²⁸ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Comment Books," Vimy House, Ottawa.

²⁹ At one point tissue was handed out at the entrance to the exhibit because so many people were leaving in tears. "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Comments Books," Vimy House, Ottawa.

³⁰ "Canvas of War" Exhibitions Files, "Comments Books," Vimy House, Ottawa.

been so normative as to go unnoticed. The next section of this paper will examine how this narrative was constructed, and how it advanced simultaneously inclusive and exclusive definitions of Canadian nationality.

The Narrative

The narrative began at the entrance to the exhibition with *Sacrifice* (fig. 8), a large canvas painted in 1918 by British artist Charles Sims. The painting was hung directly in line with the door, and placed in such a way that viewers would see it either when entering or exiting the exhibition. Significantly, visitors were informed in an accompanying label that this was the first time that *Sacrifice* had been shown since 1924, when it appeared in one of the early CWMF exhibitions, and that it was "the most nationalistic" of all the First World War works.³⁵ The top section of the canvas is composed of provincial shields above the word "sacrifice." The middle ground is occupied by Canadian soldiers, the bottom panel by portraits of Canadians, among them a *habitant* couple and a First Nations mother and child. All, in turn, are overshadowed by a crucified Christ, who occupies the entire middle portion of the canvas, and whose presence in this context equates the formation of the Canadian nation with Christ's passion. Despite the fact that the resulting "Christian Nation" depicted here may be religiously exclusive, if not intolerant, the painting's depiction of First Nations and *habitant* also make it one of the most pluralistic canvasses in the collection, and hence it was effective in one respect as an introduction to the narrative of inclusivity advanced by the curatorial team within the exhibition.

Through the use of *Sacrifice*, and canvasses depicting First Nations, women and non-British ethnicities, the curatorial team acknowledged the existence and participation of marginalized groups, despite their exclusion from dominant narratives and from

³⁵ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

descriptions of the war in earlier textbooks, histories and exhibitions.³² However, this story of inclusivity ignores the origin of the works, all of which were painted within an imperial framework and the struggle during the First World War to define Canada as an independent nation.³³ For example, by introducing *Sacrifice* as the most nationalistic canvas, the curatorial team implicitly refer to the supposed pluralism of the portraits of "Canadians" in the bottom panel of Sims's painting, suggesting that this represents national values both now and then. In its time, however, *Sacrifice* actually advanced a model of assimilation as the basis of the Canadian nation, assuming that all cultural groups wished to, and were willing to, sacrifice themselves for the country's greater good as it was defined by the dominant groups. Because nothing was done in the show to disrupt this reading, pluralism and assimilationism were, at best, conflated. This was played out elsewhere in the exhibition through the use of canvasses showing the war efforts of other subordinate groups, such as Eric Kennington's *The Conquerors* (fig. 9), a painting that like *Sacrifice*, has rarely been shown, and depicts Canadian (soldiers) of non-European ethnicity.³⁴ The plurality portrayed in canvasses such as this was also undermined by the assimilationist narratives forwarded in a row of unattributed quotes beneath Sims's canvas, which were set up to resemble a row of crosses. "War made Canada," and "Art depicts the experiences of a million in a single image," presented viewers with the notion that all were included within the curatorial team's narrative of the

³² See for example Arthur Lower, *From Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Don Mills: Longmans Canada, 1964); Arthur Lower, *Canada: An Outline History*, second edition (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1991); and Heather Robertson, *A Terrible Beauty* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1977).

³³ The struggle to define Canada is mentioned repeatedly in books such as Pierre Berton *Vimy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); Sandra Gwyn's *Tapestry of War* (Toronto: Harper and Collins, 1992); Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989); Bill Freeman and Richard Neilson, *Far From Home* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1999); Daniel G. Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987); Dancocks, *Legacy of Valour: The Canadians at Passchendaele* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1986); Grace Morris Craig, *But This is Our War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

³⁴ Lord Tweedsmuir, a former Governor General of Canada, had a poor opinion of Kennington's work. "I am very doubtful about Eric Kennington," he wrote, "his whole style is utterly remote from and undescriptive of the western front, and is of no use for purposes of record. He might just as well paint his pictures at home." (quoted in Brandon and Oliver 27).

formation of Canada. The implication was that the lessons to be learned were present in the canvasses, and those who were not addressed by them, who could not learn from them, or who could not identify with them, were not Canadian.

The actual exclusivity of the show's definition of Canada became especially apparent in the conflation of Canadian-nation building with the formation of a national school of art. In the introductory text panel, the viewer was informed through a quote from John Ruskin that "Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts: the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others," the quote continues, "but of the three the only quite trustworthy one is the last."³⁵ Given that the greater number of works in the First World War section of the show were painted by British artists, this choice of quotation might seem odd, creating as it did the viewer's expectation that the works in the show would be "made by Canadians," if not "made in Canada." However, it could be argued that this British context is important; for, as the show made apparent, the historical moment showcased in the exhibition also witnessed the birth of a "national" school of art from the context of the Empire – the repetition (in artistic terms) of the colony-to-nation narrative played out elsewhere in the exhibition.

Ruskin's words were also well-suited as they resonate strongly with the nationalist rhetoric forwarded by the Group of Seven. In fact, this very quote was used by the Group in the catalogue to their first show in 1920.³⁶ This contention is also developed within the Group's own writings as the end result of fears much like those quoted at the opening of this paper. Whereas Granatstein and others see the need for a unifying narrative of history, the Group of Seven felt that unity could be achieved through a national art movement. Group member Lawren Harris wrote in 1940, "The greatest need in Canada is for a unity of spirit over and above the great diversity of its life.... It would

³⁵ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

³⁶ A photograph of the 1920 Group of Seven catalogue showing the same quote used by the Group of Seven can be found in Peter Mellen, *The Group of Seven* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970) 216. Copies of the catalogues are held in the National Gallery.

seem that the arts, because at their best they include the religious spirit, and because they touch the life of every individual in some degree, can be most effective in creating Canadian unity.³⁷

The combination of the Group of Seven and nationalism is highly marketable, and in *Canvas of Conflict*, the video shown in the First World War section, cultural historian Maria Tippett expanded on this connection by making the link between the war work of the Group members and what have repeatedly been called the distinctively Canadian canvasses of Northern Ontario they painted later.³⁸ As far as Tippett is concerned, the one would not have been possible without the other.³⁹ The development of a national school of art as a uniquely Canadian event was also advanced in "Canvas of War" by highlighting the modernism of the Group of Seven at the expense of what appear in the show to be, by contrast, more traditional, British works. Significantly, the most well-known CWMF works by such British modern artists as Paul Nash, Wyndham Lewis, C.R.W. Nevinson and William Rothenstein did not appear in "Canvas of War;" it seems that, because they are currently in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, rather than in the War Museum, they were not included in the show. As a result, no link could be made, for example, between A.Y. Jackson's *A Copse, Evening* (1918, fig. 10) and Paul Nash's *We Are Building a New World* (1918, fig. 11). Despite the fact that Jackson admitted to being influenced by British modernism, his works stood in the exhibition as peculiarly Canadian examples of a national/modern school of art.⁴⁰

³⁷ Lawren Harris "Reconstructing Through the Arts," *Canadian Art* 1 (June-July 1944): 185.

³⁸ Laura Brandon, quoted in *Trans Canada*, television program, Cpac, 6 Nov 2000; Mellen, 1970; Joan Murray, *The Best of the Group of Seven* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984); Anne Newlands, *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson* (Toronto: Firefly Books, 1995) 8; Hill 1995.

³⁹ Maria Tippett, quoted in *Canvas of Conflict*, video, Sound Venture Productions, Ottawa, 1997.

⁴⁰ This interpretation was obvious enough to be noted by at least one reporter. Writing in the *Ottawa Citizen*, reporter Paul Gessell noted, "... the paintings provide significant signposts along the roadmap of Canada's artistic development, moving from classic European realism to more modernist – and Canadian – depictions" (Paul Gessell, "Fixing History – With a Q-Tip: Canada's War Record on Canvas is Now Ready for Display," *Ottawa Citizen* 5 Feb. 2000: E1.)

Before 1971, the National Gallery held the entire collection of war canvasses. When the collection was transferred to the War Museum that year, the National Gallery kept what were apparently considered the most artistically important canvasses, among them those by Nash, Lewis, and Nevinson, but transferred the Group of Seven canvasses to the War Museum.⁴¹ It appears that, at the time, the vehement anti-war stance of Canada during the Vietnam War made these Group works unpalatable.⁴² Now, within the nationalistic narrative of "Canvas of War," and within the context of a perceived threat to Canadian history, the formerly abandoned canvasses can occupy pride of place.

And yet, for all the importance placed on the Group, and despite the large number of Group works in the show, the image chosen to advertise the exhibition was Australian James Quinn's portrait of Victoria Cross winner *Major O.M. Learmonth* (fig. 12). While the Group of Seven works generally depict war-torn landscapes supposedly typical of the artists' later work,⁴³ the portrait of Major Learmonth, which became, in its ubiquity, the central image of the show, forwarded a certain notion of what it was, and perhaps is, to be Canadian. Brandon writes that the Canadian Museum of Civilization's advertising agency selected the image of Learmonth from six possibilities as the one that would most engage potential visitors when confronted with it in the advertising for the show; "his eyes are quite compelling for example," she writes, "and because of his uniform he is quite obviously a soldier." She expands by pointing out that he "carried meaning that would be understood by [the visitorship] beyond what he actually looked like." In other words, his looks would have resonance for those who had a portrait of a friend or relative in uniform. And finally, "[h]e also supported the title – Canvas of War – in that he was quite clearly a portrait – and therefore a painting."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Brandon and Oliver 173. It should be noted that the National Gallery did select some paintings by Canadian artists, among them, for example, works by David Milne.

⁴² Bruce Wallace, "The Art of War," *Macleans Magazine* 113 (14 Feb. 2000): 24.

⁴³ Maria Tippett, *Canvas of Conflict*. See also Laura Brandon, quoted in Bruce Wallace 24.

⁴⁴ Laura Brandon, letter to the author, 22 Feb. 2001.

Beyond these reasons, Learmonth's golden-blond hair and upright posture connect him to the idealized portraits of British officers referred to by Nevinson as "castrated Lancelots."⁴⁵ But his rugged good looks, determined facial expression and stance, broad shoulders, and clear gaze connect him more closely to General Arthur Currie's definition of the Canadian soldier as "vigorous, clean minded, good-humoured, intelligent [and] thorough."⁴⁶ He is not solely reminiscent of photographs of soldiers, but is also what historian Jonathan Vance described as the type of soldier seen in 1914 as the personification of the nation – young, proud and full of vitality and potential.⁴⁷

Literary historian Paul Fussell writes of the importance of golden-blond hair in a British First World War context as a throwback to a Victorian England tradition of beauty. According to Fussell, "To be fair-haired or (better) golden-haired is, in Victorian iconography, to be especially brave, pure, and vulnerable."⁴⁸ The connection, he writes, is to a tradition of Victorian writing on the Apollonic qualities of the Arthurian knight Galahad, whose youth, virginity and beauty were an inspiration to the other knights of the Round Table.⁴⁹ It is not only in Britain, however, that blondness and Apollo are mobilized within notions of purity, bravery and youthful enthusiasm. R.G. MacBeth, writing in 1924 of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, stated, "The men looked like models for the statue of Apollo... and with clear eye, bronzed faces and alert movements born of their clean and healthful life on the plains, they were godly to behold."⁵⁰ The link to "Canvas of War" can be made through the exhibition label for Major Learmonth, which commented at length

⁴⁵ C. R. W. Nevinson, quoted in Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (Yale University Press in association with the Barbican Art Gallery, New Haven and London, 1994) 168.

⁴⁶ Arthur Currie quoted in Vance 147.

⁴⁷ Vance 136.

⁴⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 275.

⁴⁹ Fussell 275-276.

⁵⁰ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997) 32.

upon his brave deeds, and ended with a poem by British poet Frances Cornford:

A young Apollo, golden-haired,
Stands dreaming on the verge of strife,
Magnificently unprepared
For the long littleness of life.⁵¹

More than 80 years later, the label suggests, Major Learmonth can still be seen in the same manner, that is, as a personification of nation and nationality. By using this image, the central position of the white male in the definition of Canada was emphasized. While the curatorial team included a range of work in the show, they effectively constructed the audience as one that identified with the values forwarded by this portrait – that is, the values of a dominant British-Canadian class.

It is also interesting to note in this context that the advertising for *Canvas of War*, composed of large banners and posters (fig. 13), coincided perfectly with the events, in May 2000, surrounding what has been called “The Return of the Unknown Soldier.” As a symbol of those Canadians who died fighting wars, the body of an unknown First World War soldier was brought back from a war grave in France and buried at the cenotaph in Ottawa. The posters of Major Learmonth provided the symbolic face for the Unknown Soldier.⁵² In a comment similar to that at the entrance to “Canvas of War,” the Minister of Veteran Affairs stated, “Canada’s Unknown Soldier will represent all Canadians in history.”⁵³ Thus the Unknown Soldier, like the viewer of “Canvas of War” was constructed to resemble “all Canadians.”

Following this argument, it is unlikely that anyone not fitting this definition would be portrayed within the same heroic construct. Within “Canvas of War”, this appeared to be the case. While the curatorial team included a portrait of a First Nations soldier (fig. 14) in the Second World War section, the general lack of analysis in the show worked against

⁵¹ “Canvas of War” Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

⁵² The connection was noted by many visitors to the exhibition. One of the many comments on 29 May 2000 reads, “This exhibition is most appropriate on the return of the ‘Unknown Soldier’ back to his homeland, Canada. I shall never forget this experience, heart wrenching as it is.” “Canvas of War” Exhibition Files “Comments Book 3,” Vimy House, Ottawa.

⁵³ George Baker, Minister of Veteran Affairs, CBC Newsworld, 25 May 2000.

the inclusion suggested by the presence of the work. Like Major Learmonth, Trooper Moore also has "compelling" eyes. He wears a uniform, is obviously a soldier, and is posed in a manner that would likely have resonance for those with a photo of a friend or relative in the army. The work is also quite obviously a painted portrait. Unlike the label accompanying the portrait of Major Learmonth, however, which commented at length on his heroism, his deeds, and his ultimate sacrifice, the label for Henry Lamb's portrait of *Trooper Lloyd George Moore* read simply (and without further comment), "The former title of this painting was *A Redskin in the Canadian Royal Artillery*. Trooper Moore was a member of the Three Rivers Regiment."⁵⁴ By thus ignoring issues surrounding the participation of First Nations in both wars, the work was placed within a hierarchy with the bravery of Major Learmonth at the top, and Trooper Moore, who was not even defined outside of his position in the army and his ethnic background, at the bottom. In other words, the lack of commentary turned this work into a curiosity.

In fact, "A Redskin in the Canadian Royal Artillery" was not the original title of this painting, making the museum's decision even more questionable. In a letter written in 1942, Henry Lamb stated,

The largest portrait of man in tin hat ... "Gunner Moore," as printed on back of canvas for identification and his own copy of photograph – might perhaps better be designated as that of a redskin – at least half of him I think. There seems to be not much feeling or prejudice about colour ... in Canada so I don't suppose he would mind. He is a lumberman.⁵⁵

The curator was in possession of this letter and also of the details of Trooper Moore's service. While personal details could not be disclosed as the archives had no evidence that Trooper Moore is deceased, the details of his service were available for public use.⁵⁶ While Lamb's remarks may be construed as callous, at the same time they open the way for a longer discussion of the portrait within the narrative of inclusivity begun by the curatorial team. By not including this comment, the curatorial team avoided controversy

⁵⁴ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

⁵⁵ File WA/55/33, Second World War Artists Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

⁵⁶ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Henry Lamb File," Vimy House, Ottawa.

over the sentence “[t]here seems to be not much feeling or prejudice about colour ... in Canada,” and the fact that Trooper Moore may or may not have been Aboriginal. Instead, having Trooper Moore as a “Redskin in the Canadian Royal Artillery” serves several purposes: first, it allowed the curatorial team to construct a narrative of inclusivity; second, it suggested a progressive present (in that First Nations are no longer called “Redskins”), and, third, it avoided the question of whether or not there is prejudice in Canada. Many people might be tempted to disagree with Lamb's analysis of the nation as free of “prejudice about colour.”

A lack of sensitivity to the commentary in the labels and text panels also worked against the inclusive tendency begun by choosing to display several works depicting women's contributions to the war efforts. Canvasses showing women working in the factories, in the fields, and in the hospitals were undermined by the accompanying text panel, which stated that “hundreds of thousands of wives, mothers and daughters performed tasks usually carried out by men.”⁵⁷ The women were thus defined only in relation to the soldiers, which served to subordinate them to a dominant narrative of male experience. Furthermore, although there are not many portraits of women in the CWMF collection, there is one of Lady Drummond, head of the Red Cross, painted by Florence Carlyle, as well as two portraits from the CWRC painted by Lawren P. Harris. In deciding not to include these portraits, the curatorial team highlighted the individuality of the males in portraits such as Quinn's *Major Leamonth* and William Orpen's *Sir Arthur Currie*, and suppressed that of the females. Instead, the turned faces of the anonymous women in Mabel May's *Women Making Shells* (fig. 15) and Manly MacDonald's *Land Girls Hoeing* (fig. 16) served to subordinate the women in the show to the individuality of the male portraits.

At the changeover between the First and Second World War sections, the perceived need for a new war museum was introduced. Visitors were informed that Canada's war art collection “vies with that of the Imperial War Museum in London,” and

⁵⁷ “Canvas of War” Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

that, when Lord Beaverbrook donated the collection to the Canadian people in 1921, it was with the understanding that a war memorial gallery was to be built. Instead of fulfilling his wishes, the text reads, "for fifty years the collection sat in storage at the National Gallery of Canada, small portions of it being put on exhibition infrequently. The Second World War collection suffered the same fate after 1946."⁵⁸

The plans for Beaverbrook's classically inspired museum were also displayed (fig. 17), next to a copy of the Treaty of Versailles. Surrounded by some of the most brutal canvasses in the show, including Varley's *For What?* and Cullen's *Dead Horse and Rider in a Trench*, the display advanced the idea that those who sacrificed themselves for the greater good of the country were being done a misdeed by the lack of a museum for the collection. Indeed, upon hearing that the Canadian government would donate close to 60 million dollars for a new war museum, primarily in response to a campaign named "Passing the Torch," veteran and campaign chair Barney Danson commented: "...the building of this new museum will mean that we haven't broken faith."⁵⁹ This idea was also raised in many of the comments made in the "Canvas of War" comment book, where the permanent display of these works was equated with a greater knowledge of Canadian history. An argument for a new war museum was constructed as if Canadians have been deprived by lack of access to the collection, when in reality, the CWMF was quickly forgotten in post-World War One Canada. Although there were calls for a new gallery, they only came in the years immediately after the war. According to art historian Annabel Hanson, the imperialist content of the work, and numerous works painted by British artists, made the collection an inappropriate symbol of Canada's supposed coming of age.⁶⁰ Now, in the context of "Canvas of War" and the quest for a

⁵⁸ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Canvas of War Pamphlet", Vimy House, Ottawa. "Canvas of War Pamphlet" is a photocopied brochure that was sent to art galleries throughout Canada as background material to the exhibition.

⁵⁹ Barney Danson, quoted in Chris Cobb, "Canadian War Museum Gets Cash for New Home," *Montreal Gazette* 17 March 2000: A12.

⁶⁰ Annabel Fay Hanson, "The Pantheon on Nepean Point?: The Canadian War Memorials Collection in Historical Context," MA Thesis (Queen's University, Kingston, 2000) 2.

new War Museum, the British and imperialist aspects of the collection were largely subsumed into an overarching narrative of Canadian nationality.

In terms of creating an inclusive narrative, the Second World War collection allowed the curatorial team some choice. The representation of women, First Nations, and other non-British ethnicities is, if not representative of the actual population living in Canada at the time, at least present in the CWRC. While Molly Lamb Bobak was the only female artist hired by the government, well-known artists Paraskeva Clark and Pegi Nicol MacLeod were both given commissions by the National Gallery to paint scenes of the home front. Although all of the artists hired were White, the painting of Trooper Moore discussed above allowed the curatorial team to include a First Nations soldier, while Jack Nichols's sketch, *Negro Soldiers Returning on Board a Canadian Ship* (fig. 18), too fragile for display but included in the catalogue, allowed for the inclusion of Black-Canadians. Through the display of Alex Colville's paintings from the liberation of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp (fig. 19), the curatorial team were also afforded the opportunity to deal with some of the horrors of war. On the other hand, because the collection lacks any paintings of the Japanese internment camps,⁶¹ the war in the Pacific, the plight of Canadian prisoners of war in Hong Kong, or the controversy surrounding

⁶¹ J.L. Granatstein writes that the internment of Japanese Canadians should be defended as "militarily necessary." He points out that several Japanese-Canadians were recruited as spies, that most were not interned, but were simply evacuated, and that there was near panic in British Columbia from fear of an imminent Japanese attack. Accordingly it was the seizure of property rather than the internment for which the Canadian government should be apologetic. In addition to this now controversial argument, he argues that all Canadian immigrants should be assimilated into Canadian society and should be taught Canadian mores, values and ways of life. In other words, immigrants should not be hyphenated Canadians but should be assimilated fully into Canadian society (Granatstein 1998 96-97). The problem arises when a dominant class can decide in times of stress who is or who is not Canadian. By blithely assuming that Japanese-Canadians sided with Japan during the war, Granatstein trips on his own argument. One cannot be fully and partially assimilated at the same time. In completely avoiding the discussion of this issue, the exhibition is able to create a myth of a Canada unified through war. Thus in the catalogue for "Canvas of War" Brandon and Oliver appear to be arguing against Granatstein, writing "The argument, that the move was made in part to protect them from local retribution, carried little weight with families whose possessions and property local authorities soon confiscated." However, a paragraph later they contradict this statement with the comment, "Canadians acted in many cases with the best interests of their country at heart..." (Brandon and Oliver 102). According to Brandon and Oliver, either Japanese-Canadians are not, by their definition, Canadian, or the "Canadians" to whom they refer have not been appropriately identified by them as non-Japanese Canadians.

conscription, several controversial subjects were not dealt with.

The display of the two very different war art collections presented some obvious difficulties for the curatorial team in maintaining the exhibition's coherence as a whole. "The spirit that produced the art in the First World War," said Brandon, "was tied to the atmosphere of the period, which was very much concerned with memorial, sacrifice, the terrible impact on society. By the time the Second World War came along there was less interest in memorial and much more interest in documenting what actually happened."⁸² In the Second World War collection there are no vast canvasses to equal Richard Jack's large representations of Vimy Ridge and the Second Battle of Ypres. The lack of scale is the most obvious drawback in trying to present an exhibition that was intended to inspire awe in its viewers and thus fill them with pride, but the generally humdrum subject matter of most of the Second World War canvasses also presented the curatorial team with a challenge. According to the artistic record, "what actually happened," was that many Canadian soldiers spent a lot of time sitting around playing cards and waiting between bouts of fierce fighting where artists were often not allowed. Despite increasing recognition of the importance of such social history, this may not have been regarded by the curatorial team as inspirational material, particularly when coupled with the ultimate horrors of war shown in Alex Colville's concentration camp works.⁸³ It could even be argued that the Canadian experience of war in Europe was ultimately so different from that depicted in the few canvasses of concentration camps that the latter's marginalization within an aesthetically-oriented exhibition was certain. This was noted by at least one visitor, who wrote in the comment book, "As a Jew I felt disconnected, as if

⁸² Laura Brandon, quoted in Stephen Smith "The Art of War," *National Post* 4 Mar 2000: 5.

⁸³ The first year of the Second World War was known, for example as the Phony War because there were no "hot" battles at the time, and both sides were engaged in a waiting game as troops and ammunition were built up. See for example J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989); Ted Barris and Alex Barris, *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember 1939-1945* (Toronto: MacMillan Canada, 1995). War artists, who entered the war sometime after the phony war, struggled to find subject matter that would fit the CWRC guidelines, avoid censorship, yet still be of interest to the public. See the artist interviews in *Canvas of War*, video, Sound Venture Productions, Ottawa, 2000.

the liberation of Bergen-Belsen was a side effect of the war. Unfortunately that is exactly what it was in the eyes of Canadians at that time."⁴⁴

This example is illustrative of a general theme in the Second World War collection, where the colony-to-nation narrative advanced in the first section was replaced by an emphasis on "a Canadian" experience of war, something that can of course be expected in a government-sponsored initiative to record the conflict. Aside from Colville's canvas of dead concentration camp victims, Jack Nichols's *Drowning Sailor*, a canvas showing a drowning German sailor, and Jack Nichols's *Normandy Scene, Beach in Gold Area*, which shows refugees from France, one might think the Canadians were fighting on their own, against an invisible enemy, in an unpopulated land. Thus, the past created in this segment of the exhibition is more "Canadianized," more autonomous and self-referential, with events in the canvasses referring to a Canadian experience rather than a pan-Second World War one.⁴⁵

According to Tony Bennett, this sort of self-referencing was of paramount importance after the First World War in constructing a narrative of independent national history within a British/imperial framework. Writing about Australia, Bennett notes that the importance of the past was judged according to British imperialist norms, and hence, military might was of significant consequence in defining national importance. Thus, in order to lay claim to a past that could be represented in the same manner as the past of Britain, the colonies drew on their wartime experience – the Australians at Gallipoli, the Canadians both at Vimy Ridge and in the country's separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles.⁴⁶

Within the context of the CWMF collection, the need to connect events to an imperial framework in order to create a Canadian history is exemplified by Lord Beaverbrook's acquisition of Benjamin West's *The Death of Wolfe* (1770) for the

⁴⁴ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Comments Book 8," Vimy House, Ottawa.

⁴⁵ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 133.

⁴⁶ Bennett 137.

collection. During the Great War, battles were connected not only to earlier British conflicts, but also, whenever possible, to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. The connection was symbolically realized in the Canadian Battalions' ritual of laying their flags on Wolfe's tomb in Westminster Abbey before leaving for France.⁶⁷ Beaverbrook also commissioned British artist Edgar Bundy to paint companion works of Champlain landing in Quebec in 1603 and the landing of the First Canadian Division at St. Nazaire in 1915, thereby linking Canada's past to the modern age.⁶⁸ After the First World War, the imperial lexicon was no longer as important; events were connected to a Canadian experience instead. Thus, in the Second World War section of "Canvas of War," the role of a national school of art, which had been essential to a colony-to-nation narrative, was subsumed into a "Canadianized" experience of the war.

Curator Laura Brandon and historian Dean Oliver write that the small size, strict instructions given to war artists, and generally mundane subject matter of most of the Second World War canvasses worked against the glorious heroic narrative of much of the First World War work, in favour of more "depersonalized" accounts of the war.⁶⁹ Their analysis begs the question of how work done in situ, by Second World War artists who served as enlisted personnel in the fighting services, can be seen as less personal than work such as that of Richard Jack, which was done in a studio by an artist who

⁶⁷ Maria Tippett, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 45. Beaverbrook also acquired portraits of Alexander Mackenzie and Joseph Brant (Vance 154).

⁶⁸ Vance 154. Beaverbrook reacted with alarm when an attempt was made to transfer the historical works from the collection to the Dominion Archives, stating that such a move would be disastrous to the whole conception of the CWMF (Vance 154).

⁶⁹ Brandon and Oliver 156. The following instructions were issued to each artist: "You are expected to record and interpret vividly and veraciously, according to your artistic sense, (1) the spirit and character, the appearance and attitude of the men, as individuals or groups, of the Service to which you are attached – (2) instruments and machines which they employ, and (3) the environment in which they do their work. The intention is that your productions shall be worthy of Canada's highest cultural traditions, doing justice to History, and as works of art, worthy of exhibition anywhere at any time" (quoted in Brandon and Oliver 156). Brandon and Oliver make much of the supposed strict controls placed on artists. However, in an interview conducted on the opening night of the exhibition, Molly Lamb Bobak stated to one reporter, "I'm struck by how well done [the paintings] are. We were never told what to do - we had a great deal of freedom" (Molly Lamb Bobak quoted in Melanie Scott, "War's Enduring Artistic Legacy," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 Feb. 2000: E1).

had never been near the front lines.⁷⁰ Characterizing the works as “depersonalized” representations of the war repositioned them as reportage. In other words, because they are “depersonalized,” it should be self-evident that these works are “truthful” renditions of the Canadian war experience. However, while the immediate impact of the huge canvasses was removed, the depersonalization of the later works took place through a curatorial choice not to personalize them. The lack of commentary on Trooper Lloyd George Moore’s portrait, for example, could be explained away through a “depersonalized” definition of Trooper Moore as representative of every First Nations soldier, which, according to Henry Lamb’s own testimony, he may not have been.

Thus, as in the First World War section, it appeared that in the Second World War section the curatorial team attempted to forward a narrative of inclusivity without actually commenting on it, allowing the “depersonalized” paintings to “speak for themselves.” This explains why the commentary on Jack Nichols’s *Negro Sailors Returning on Board a Canadian Ship* (fig. 18) addressed neither the otherness of the Black soldiers within Canada and the Canadian Army, nor the depiction of the Black sailors as blank-eyed and muscular, with jutting jaws and exaggerated lips. An extreme case in point is the face of the sailor in the back left, which is practically formed by his lips. Nichols’s drawing could easily have been used as a point of discussion, as it unwittingly illustrates the segregation of non-white soldiers in the Canadian army, the stereotypical depiction of the Black body by the White artist, and the fact that the racial makeup of the Canadian army was not so homogeneous as the CWRC would suggest. Instead, the commentary on the painting is centered around Nichols’s effort to find room for himself on the merchant navy ship. The sailors are rendered invisible, and thus “depersonalized” through lack of commentary, which was instead centered on the importance of the white male artist to an understanding of the picture and the world it depicts.

⁷⁰ H.O. McCurry, quoted in *Exhibition of Canadian War Art* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Art, 1945) 3. Artists such as Leonard Brooks spent months on board merchant navy ships, experiencing first-hand the mixture of boredom and fear, while others such as Bruno Bobak and Will Ogilvie experienced the front-lines in a first-hand and often dangerous manner (*Canvas of War*, video, Sound Venture Productions, Ottawa, 2000).

Similarly, the dismissal of the paintings as depersonalized mitigates against Molly Lamb Bobak and Paraskeva Clark's very personal, written accounts of the war. While Lamb Bobak's diary accounts of the war and Clark's comments on women on the home front were quoted in the exhibition, both subvert war as an essentially male domain. Lamb Bobak's painting *Canteen, Nijmegen, Holland* (fig. 20), illustrates off-duty life as a young female member of the Canadian Women's Army Corps (hereafter CWAC) serves cakes to a room full of men and women in uniform. The main figures in the canvas are all female, including both the only figure to make direct eye contact with the viewer, and a woman in glasses who is working through the accounts and, in doing so, helping the war effort. The painting was accompanied by a humorous comment from Lamb Bobak's illustrated diary, which she kept throughout the entire war:

On Wednesday, the 18th of November [1942], Civilian Lamb offered herself unwillingly and willingly, willy-nilly to the CWAC. When reporters interviewed her on Wednesday night they found her in a mental state. "I've never known such misery," she stated torturedly. "Except when I didn't win the scholarship at school. After they said my second medical was good, I was sent to different floors of the Barracks to get an arm band, a knife and fork and spoon, a mattress, 3 blankets, a pillow and two sheets... I went through long dark corridors with an experienced Private who told me I must learn to walk faster and didn't answer any of my bewildered questions."⁷¹

This comment is one of the more negative ones from Lamb Bobak's diary, which portrays the war as a terrible thing, but also as an exciting, and often fun time. Words used to describe her diary are more generally in the line of "charming," and "humorous."⁷² Her humour and optimism undermine a narrative that portrays war as an always horrific endeavour, and her position as a female artist in the war zone (albeit after the termination of the conflict) subverts the notion of war as an entirely male pursuit. Her writing and her paintings are nothing if not personal.

Similarly, the quote used to accompany Paraskeva Clark's painting subverts the

⁷¹ Quoted in Brandon and Oliver 144. Interestingly, the War Museum did not want Molly Lamb Bobak's war diary, which was instead donated to the National Archives (Carolyn Gossage, ed. *Double Duty, Sketches and Diaries of Molly Lamb Bobak, Canadian War Artist* [Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1992] 14).

⁷² Gossage 14.

notion of suffering in war as an entirely male domain. She wrote in 1945 to H.O. McCurry, Director of the National Gallery,

You see, I feel that dramatic subject... is not among C.W.A.C. but among millions [of] women who stayed in their homes, carrying [sic] on some jobs, some responsibilities plus their usual home duties, – with hearts full of constant pain longing and sorrow for their men gone fighting. Being CWAC was the easiest thing to do, the most pleasant. Throwing off the eternal chores and drodgerly [sic] of woman's life – woman entered a regulated orderly life, with one duty set upon each for so many hours each day, with the glory and glamour of uniform to top it! The jobs – mostly clerical, or as servants, cooks. All that is important, but where is drama?⁷³

Certainly, Lamb Bobak's and Clark's comments are not the only personal ones made by war artists, and in the exhibition they did not stand out as such. What is important is that the possibilities for a counter-narrative suggested by the accounts of these artists was ignored. Thus, in the First World War section, commentary was used to promote a certain definition of nationhood, as in the case of Major Learmonth. In the Second World War section, commentary was suppressed, as many of the accounts, particularly those by non-hegemonic artists, did not function appropriately within an aesthetic definition of nationhood forwarded by the exhibition.

At the end of the section, the curatorial team included a copy of the 1949 report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Massey Commission Report), and claimed that the Canada Council emerged directly from Vincent Massey's work for the CWRC.⁷⁴ This analysis fit nicely with Tippet's contention in the video accompanying the First World War section that both a national school of art and art patronage emerged from the First World War; thus, in keeping with the show's developmental narrative, it was suggested that a government-sponsored national culture emerged, in turn, from the Second World War. In this way, the development of a national culture was presented as an important part of Canada's history, and as such, something that should be mobilized through exhibitions and cultural events such as "Canvas of War."

⁷³ Quoted in Brandon and Oliver 93.

⁷⁴ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Label, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

According to the historical account, however, a direct connection between the CWRC, the Massey Commission, and the Canada Council is tenuous, despite the fact that Vincent Massey was in charge of the war artists.⁷⁵ The Massey Commission Report may have been included because the original Massey Commission has often been seen as responsible for creating the cultural environment in which institutions such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the National Gallery, and the National Library and Archives were built and maintained with public money.⁷⁶ Thus, it provided a nice segue into the continued discussion of the need for a new war museum.

After leaving the Second World War section the visitor passed through a small, dimly lit, room containing William Macdonnell's 1994 epilogue canvas *Sappers Clearing a Deadfall* (fig. 4), and a seating area where entries could be written in the comments book. In the "epilogue" room, Macdonnell's canvas was surrounded by pamphlets and posters advertising the need for a new war museum, thus conflating Canada's current-day self-image as a peacekeeper with the need to retain certain Canadian historical narratives.⁷⁷ Having completed the tour of the exhibition, the viewer left the exhibition, passing by Ruskin's quote on the nation's art, and Charles Sims' canvas *Sacrifice*,

⁷⁵ The CWRC is not mentioned, for example, in Paul Litt's comprehensive book on the Massey Commission. Litt also argues that the connection between the Massey Commission and the Canada Council has often been exaggerated, and was a result of coincidence rather than cause and effect. (Paul Litt, *The Muses the Masses and the Massey Commission* [Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992] 238-248.)

⁷⁶ "By the end of the war, the work of Canada's war artists had contributed to the renewed interest in the quality of Canadian art as a whole. This led to the establishment in 1949 of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. Chaired by Vincent Massey, the driving force behind Canada's Second World War art program, the Commission produced a report that remains the basis of Canadian cultural policy." Canvas of War website, <<http://www.civilization.ca/cwm/canvas/cwint01e.html>>.

⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, the numerous canvasses in the CAFCAP collection showing Canadian "peacekeepers" in Somalia were not included. However, this could have been an interesting point of discussion. CAFCAP was disbanded in the wake of the Somalia Affair, where the Canadian Air Borne Regiment was disbanded following the torture and murder of a Somali youth. Much of the art work from Somalia, such as Allan Mackay's *Women in Abattoir* video from 1997, is fairly disturbing, and presents a very different picture of Canadian peacekeepers than that represented in MacDonnell's painting (Allan Mackay, *Somalia Yellow* website, <http://www.vanitygallery.com/stride/view_mackay1.html>.) See also Johnny Bachusky, "Somalia Through an Artist's Eyes," *Toronto Star* 12 Jan. 1998: E4; Bill Cameron, "Canadian War Artist Rips Work," *National*, CBC (Toronto), 8 Feb. 2000; Sandie Rinaldo, "War Paintings Fall Victim to Budget Cuts," *National News*, CTV (Toronto) 20 Jan. 1996.

bringing the visitor full-circle through a narrative of nation-building and assimilation. "Canvas of War" ended with the idea that Canada's future as a nation worthy of the sacrifices made by those portrayed in the canvasses depended on public acceptance of the war art collection as an important and truthful narrative of Canadian history – a public acceptance best illustrated, of course, in support of a new war museum to house the collection.

Chapter 3

The Videos

As the largest exhibition ever organized by the Canadian War Museum, and as the lynchpin of the museum's attempt to secure support from the government and public for a new building, "Canvas of War" had to be highly appealing and profitable, both emotionally and financially. Hence, like many large exhibitions, and unlike most exhibitions put together by the war museum, "Canvas of War" had several ancillary programs, including talks by war artists and veterans and poetry readings. In addition, a boutique-like display was set up outside the exhibition in the Canadian Museum of Civilization to sell reproductions of posters from the original Canadian War Memorials Fund exhibition in 1919, videos and books on the topic of war art, as well as prints from the show, the show's catalogue, and copies of *Canvas of Conflict* and *Canvas of War*, the two videos used within the exhibition. The videos were designed to complement the show, but also to stand on their own, to be purchased both by those wanting a souvenir of the exhibition, and as educational tools to be used by schools, universities and the wider populace. Although neither *Canvas of Conflict* (1996) nor *Canvas of War* (2000) was produced specifically for the exhibition, both were created in cooperation with the war museum, with either Laura Brandon or Jack Granatstein acting as liaison to the producers.¹ Given this, one would suspect the videos to be similar in outlook and goals to the exhibition, and to a certain extent this appears to be the case. Neither video, however, is concerned with the exhibition as such; instead, they forward narratives that are complementary, but not necessarily analogous, to those of "Canvas of War." This chapter analyzes the videos, their place within the show, and the significance of the narratives they both share with the exhibition and, as part of the afterlife of the show, help to disseminate.

¹ Sound Venture Productions website, <www.soundventures.com>.

The Place of the Videos in the Exhibition

Within the space of "Canvas of War," the videos provided resting points in the flow of the exhibition. Set in alcoves off the main rectangular pathway, the videos could be heard, but not seen, throughout. Thus, they attracted groupings of people, who congregated around the televisions, drawn by the moving images and emotional cues provided by the music. In both sections, the televisions on which the videos were shown were set in "bunkers," constructed of sandbags, debris, cardboard trenches and jagged panel edges, and designed to fit within the Museum of Civilization's ideal of an entertaining environment.² While the bunkers were not a believable representation of war, they provided a visual cue as to what the viewer would see. The false debris suggested that although the subject was war, it would be dealt with in an inoffensive and probably non-violent manner.

Art historian Judith Wechsler notes that when watching a video (even with the use of a pause button), there is little time to immediately analyze the video's content. Thus, "narration often directs the viewer's attention to a fixed interpretation more emphatically than the camera work alone."³ This appeared to be the case in "Canvas of War," where five to ten minute video clips were placed on a loop so that the message was heard (if not seen) continuously. Taken out of the context of the full-length videos, the short segments served two purposes: first, to support the narratives of the exhibition, and, second, to act as advertisement for the full-length videos. Not surprisingly, the segments chosen were those parts of the videos that supported the narratives advanced through the exhibition labels and selection of works in the show. In the First World War section of the exhibition, the video clip reiterated the importance of the war to the development of the Group of Seven and the construction of a national school of art,

² George Macdonald and Stephen Alford, *Museum for the Global Village* (Hull: Museum of Civilization, 1989) 101.

³ Judith Wechsler, "Art History and Films on Art," in ed. Nadine Covert, *Art on Screen: a Directory of Films and Videos About the Visual Arts* (New York: Program for Art on Film, a joint venture of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Trust, 1991) 8. See also John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992).

setting it within the context of a colony-to-nation narrative. In the Second World War section, the importance of the artist and the neglect of the war art collection were highlighted in the video clip, and supported by pamphlets throughout the exhibition promoting the idea that "Canada's War Art Needs a New Home."⁴ Both televisions were set next to panels advertising the fact that the full-length videos could be purchased in the museum's gift shop, where they quickly sold out.⁵

Although used in the exhibition, the full length videos were actually made independently by Sound Venture Productions, an Ottawa-based company known for its nationalistic cultural and childrens' programming.⁶ With help from the Canadian War Museum, CBC, Bravo!, The Cable Production Fund, and The Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation, it produced *Canvas of Conflict*, the video dealing with the First World War CWMF collection, in 1996, for the CBC television program *Adrienne Clarkson Presents*. *Canvas of Conflict* producer Neil Bregman then initiated *Canvas of War* in a letter to War Museum director J.L. Granatstein on 7 January 1997, in which he broached the possibility of a second documentary. "Sound Venture Productions," he wrote, is "very interested in producing a documentary based loosely upon the exhibition theme and materials which would accompany the exhibit, but one which would also act as a stand-alone TV special."⁷ By this time the planning of the exhibition was well under way, and the offer from Sound Venture Productions was gladly accepted, with both sides benefiting. The result is that the audience at whom "Canvas of War" was aimed may already have been primed for the exhibition through cultural television presentations on

⁴ "Canada's War Art Needs a New Home," brochure, "Canvas of War," Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000.

⁵ I visited the exhibition twice in the summer of 2000. Both times the English language editions of the videos were sold out.

⁶ Some of Sound Venture's productions include *Canvas of Conflict* and *Canvas of War* as well as *Art for a Nation* the video accompanying the 1995 Group of Seven exhibition, *Angels of Mercy*, covering First and Second World War nurses, and *Jewel on the Hill* about the houses of parliament. They also have an extensive list of educational programming for children and cultural events such as ballet (Sound Venture Productions website, <www.soundventures.com>).

⁷ "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Book 16," Vimy House, Ottawa.

the CBC, Bravo! and History Television.

Canvas of Conflict

Canvas of Conflict, the video dealing with Canadian war art created during the First World War, is centered around two "conflicts." The first, built up within the context of the CWMF, is a conflict between Britain and Canada, which is manifested in a colony-to-nation history of the Canadian art scene. The second is the "conflict" between the modern and traditional art that arose during the war years, the "conflict" specifically avoided in the exhibition. The video begins by describing the difficulties of being an artist during wartime, focusing on the opportunities offered by the recently formed CWMF, and the disappointment felt by Canadians when only British artists were hired to cover the activities of Canadian soldiers in the field. The resulting conflict, and the eventual hiring of Canadian artists (among them future members of the Group of Seven) are developed alongside a narrative of the First World War as a catastrophic and bloody struggle that defied portrayal in the language of traditional art. Throughout the video, the ideas of anonymity and struggle, both of soldiers and artists, are advanced, and provide a counterpoint to the subsequently successful attempt by Canadian artists to develop a Canadian school of art and patronage.

Predating Jonathan Vance's *Death So Noble* (1997) and J.L. Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History?* (1998), the videos are based on an interpretation of the war as a brutal, wrenching and disastrous conflict, beyond the descriptive powers of most, yet profoundly influential on Western society. Advanced in texts such as Richard Cork's exhibition catalogue, *A Bitter Truth: The Avant Garde and the Great War* (1994), Paul Fussell's seminal text, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), and Canadian historian Modris Eksteins's *Rites of Spring* (1989), *Canvas of Conflict's* writers support the notion that those best able to describe the conflict were modern artists and writers – among them, painters such as Paul Nash, Wyndham Lewis, and F.H. Varley, and poets

such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen.⁸

The idea of the artist as ultimate commentator on war is supported in *Canvas of Conflict* through commentary by historians Hugh Halliday and Maria Tippett, and National Gallery of Canada curator Charles Hill, who argue that the artist can capture something that photography, film and word cannot. Halliday, who, for the most part, peppers the narrative with amusing anecdotes, goes so far as to state that the soldiers were either "illiterate" or "inarticulate," hence artists were needed to construct for Canada a record of the war. In one sentence, he validates the artist's voice while silencing that of the soldier.

In the four years between the production of *Canvas of Conflict* and the opening of "Canvas of War," however, the overarching value of artistic and poetic representations of the Great War has been questioned by scholars who claim that these readings are based too heavily on interpretations that privileged the idea of an avant garde.⁹ Giving increased profile to growing interest in the traditional art produced during the war, recent social-historical interpretations, such as Jonathan Vance's account of post-war memorializing of the Great War in Canada, demonstrate that, in spite of anti-war novels, poems and art work, the vast majority of people continued to see the war as a glorious

⁸ See for example, Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Barbican Art Gallery, New Haven and London, 1994); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989). For a rebuttal of the "mud and blood" description of the Great War see John Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), and Jonathan Vance's description of Canadian reactions to the war in his book *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). Ward Churchill's discussion of pacifism is also illuminating in the context of specifically anti-war or pacifist narratives. Churchill claims that pacifism is the "right" of the dominant class. By not upsetting the balance of power, pacifism upholds the status quo while assuaging the consciences of those "protesting." He points out that pacifism works to protect the state (or possibly the transnational corporation) as peaceful protests rarely accomplish any goals other than the ego stroking of those participating. (Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology* [Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 1998] 29-40.)

⁹ See for example Vance 1997; Sue Malvern, "War as it is' the art of Muirhead Bone, C.R.W. Nevinson and Paul Nash 1916-1917," *Art History* 9 (Dec. 1986): 487-515; Terraine 1980; Paul J. Gough, "Painting the Landscape of Battle: The Development of Pictorial Language in British Art on the Western Front 1914-1918" PhD Thesis (Royal College of Art, London, 1991).

conflict in which no one died in vain.¹⁰ Political-historical interpretations also challenge the earlier emphasis on horrific accounts of the war. J.L. Granatstein, for example, contends that Canadian history should be taught positively, not overlooking the horrors of war, but concentrating on Canadian determination in the face of adversity.¹¹ Thus, the interpretation advanced in *Canvas of Conflict* that a modern, artistic elite was the only group capable of rendering an accurate description of the war, has been challenged. Laura Brandon herself, writing of a British-sponsored website on First World War art stated, "we were asked to participate but they wanted much money – and the thesis was all modernist which excluded the kind of art we had in our collection – and in my opinion resurrected a now rather *passé* view of the art of WW1."¹²

Canvas of Conflict also makes use of a familiar colony-to-nation narrative, present in numerous Canadian history books, as well as in the exhibition itself.¹³ Unlike "Canvas of War," however, the video makes no attempt to advance this colony-to-nation progression within an inclusive narrative, and offers no excuses for its vehemently Anglo-Canadian interpretation of war.¹⁴ The video draws only on the works found in the CWMF, and because it does not deal with the overwhelmingly one-sided emphasis of the paintings, the normative qualities of the collection, and the British-Canadian narrative of the video, are presented as fact, rather than interpretation. Narrator Gordon Pinsent tells us in the opening segment of the video that "[Canada] was a land of boundless beauty and resource where English gardens and giant redwoods were equally at home.

¹⁰ Vance 3-11.

¹¹ Granatstein x-xvii.

¹² "Canvas of War" Exhibition Files, "Book 16," Vimy House, Ottawa; Art of the First World War, website, <<http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/index2.html>>.

¹³ See for example Arthur Lower, *From Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Don Mills: Longmans Canada, 1964).

¹⁴ *Canvas of Conflict* is Anglo-Canadian through the complete exclusion of others to the point that only the experiences of Anglophone male Canadians, on both the fighting and home fronts, are discussed.

It was a colony about to become a nation...."¹⁵ The assumption is that Canada emerged from its colonial status as a British dominion, where the conquering of the wilderness by English gardens was inevitable. Pinsent then launches into a description of the difficulty of being an artist in 1914, and hyperbolically notes that "The life and death struggle in France," was paralleled by the "struggle at home for artists." The slick production of the video is notable as documentary footage fades into paintings and back again in an artistic pastiche as the title comes on screen and Pinsent announces the thesis of the video: "This is how [artists] would survive. How they came to create a canvas of conflict."

The choice of Gordon Pinsent as narrator for the video is significant. A well-known Canadian actor and nationalist originally from Newfoundland, Pinsent's voice is familiar, not only from his work as an actor, but also as narrator of the Sound Venture Production video for the National Gallery's 1995 Group of Seven exhibition "Art For a Nation."¹⁶ Pinsent is not the only connection to "Art For a Nation," which, like "Canvas of War," ran into criticism for its definition of nationality. As art historian Lynda Jessup writes in a review of the earlier exhibition:

Keep in mind that we are a quarter of a century into state support, through government policy, of a Canadian nationality based on the notion of multiculturalism. In this sense alone, it is surprising that a state supported institution would unquestioningly thrust the Group of Seven's work at contemporary audiences as "Art for a Nation." Something is wrong here. The introductory panel to the exhibition clearly states, "The Group's goals were nationalist and their prime audience was English Canadian," yet the show does not address the implications of this...¹⁷

The two videos are also remarkably similar, and both were produced and directed by Neil Bregman and Katherine Jeans respectively. The formula used in *Canvas of Conflict* is obviously the successful formula used in the earlier *Art for a Nation* video; that is, in both videos the Group of Seven are presented as the winners in a struggle against a

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from *Canvas of Conflict*, video, Sound Venture Productions, Ottawa, 1997.

¹⁶ Gordon Pinsent *By the Way* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992). In his autobiography, Pinsent describes moving from pre-Confederation Newfoundland to Canada, and his growing love for his new country.

¹⁷ Lynda Jessup, "Art for a Nation?" *Fuse* 19 (Summer 1996) 13.

parochial establishment (in *Art for a Nation* against conservative critics, in *Canvas of Conflict* conservative British artists). The CWMF was being put together by Lord Beaverbrook at the same time that the Group of Seven was coalescing as a major force in the Canadian art scene. The War Memorials Fund can thus be seen, in this context, as simply a lucrative aspect of the Group of Seven waiting to be explored in the wake of the popular "Art for a Nation" exhibition, which had touched on the First World War, and had included Varley's canvas *For What?*.

The importance of the Group of Seven to the Canadian art scene is skillfully woven into *Canvas of Conflict* through the introduction of the CWMF, and its overlord, Max Aitken, who became Lord Beaverbrook shortly after the start of the war. Beaverbrook is portrayed as a visionary working to secure the exploits of the Canadian army for posterity, perhaps not a surprising characterization given the support of the video by the Beaverbrook Canadian Foundation. "Unfortunately," Maria Tippett tells us, "he didn't know anything about art... He knew nothing!" This allows Gordon Pinsent to introduce Beaverbrook's first action, the commissioning of British artist Richard Jack to reconstruct the Canadian's stand at the Second Battle of Ypres, where the Canadians had held the line against the first German gas attacks. Jack's enormous painting, which provided the centerpiece for "Canvas of War" is dismissed in the video as "glorious and romantic." The criticism of traditional paintings like Jack's builds throughout the video into a dichotomy between traditional, and hence "glorious and romantic" art, and modern art, which was supposedly much better suited to portraying the wrecked landscape of the front lines. This dichotomy runs into trouble when the script also attempts to divide the art into the categories it was given in the immediate post-war years – traditional becomes "historic," and modern becomes "art alone." According to *Canvas of Conflict*,

the unreal quality of these new [modernist] forms captured the horror of the nightmare landscape in ways that the traditional forms could not. Their sharp lines mirror the shattered landscape, the mechanical appearance of the men fit perfectly with the repetitious and dehumanizing tasks that filled the soldier's day...

But, the notion of modern art as a more effective representation of war is contradicted later in the video when Pinsent asks, "[w]as it to be a historical record or art alone?"

indicating that modern art cannot be both.

The "conflict on canvas" constructed by the video never existed in quite such hyperbolic terms. Art critic Hector Charlesworth for instance, so often called upon when derogatory descriptions of the Group of Seven are needed, wrote a particularly illuminating review of the 1920 CWMF exhibition in Toronto that demonstrates, first, his awareness of his own bias, and, second, his reluctance to dismiss the "modern works." Charlesworth writes,

While the writer is by temperament a champion of tradition, he can sympathize with those painters who felt that tradition and academic technique could not express for them what they had to record.... Who shall say but that to future generations the panels which strike us as wantonly hideous will not carry a more effective message of what Canadians endured in the great war [sic], than some of the works in which nobility of treatment is obvious. It is a question that neither I, nor anyone of this generation, may hope to decide.¹⁸

In the video, the result is a confused and contradictory account of the purpose of the CWMF work. However, a confused account allows for several interpretations. First, the modern art of Group of Seven members A.Y. Jackson and F.H. Varley can be highlighted in contrast to work such as that of Richard Jack. Second, Beaverbrook (a Canadian) can be portrayed as a visionary, while his Hungarian assistant Paul Konody can be portrayed as the villain Canadian artists had to overcome. Third, it allows Tippett, Halliday and Hill a great deal of leeway in advancing their own opinions about the work. Fourth, it facilitates, by playing on this confusion, an explanation as to why the art was almost immediately boxed up and placed in storage, not to be seen again for more than seventy years. And finally, it permits an interpretation of war as a senseless massacre from which a school of art emerged heroically, pushed forward by the need for a new language to portray the horror of conflict.

Pinsent tells us that the war was "a wild vortex of killing that threw in men and materials at rates that defied imagination. A desperation to end the conflict quickly had gripped all sides, twisting their reasoning. Generals took to throwing their men in human

¹⁸ Hector Charlesworth, "Reflections" *Saturday Night* (18 Sep. 1920) 2.

waves that broke against enemy defences...." This interpretation was noticeably absent from "Canvas of War" where descriptions such as this were avoided, and visitors were moved by modern and traditional canvasses alike. One reason may be that the War Museum holds far more traditional canvasses than modern paintings; it would have been difficult, if not self-defeating, for the exhibition to advance a view of the conflict as a "bloody mistake," the horrors of which were captured only in the more modern works.¹⁹ In contrast, the video advances this idea, making use of a large number of paintings not used in the exhibition, among them works that remained at the National Gallery after the transfer of the collection to the Canadian War Museum in 1971. As a result, while the lack of paintings by Paul Nash, Wyndham Lewis and David Milne work in the exhibition to exaggerate the modernism of the Group of Seven, in the video paintings by British modern artists are discussed and the Group is placed front and center primarily through Tippett's commentary.

Highlighting the first "conflict on canvas," Jackson and Varley are presented as the winners of the struggle to get Canadian painters to France. Hugh Halliday notes that National Gallery Director Eric Brown and Sir Edmund Walker, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, had quite a job convincing Konody that Canadians should be hired. Finally, in 1917, several were, and Pinsent notes that "[p]erhaps the greatest legacy of this time were the future members of the Group of Seven who were determined to develop almost single-handedly a uniquely Canadian style." The video then proceeds to tell the viewer of the exploits, not only of Jackson and Varley, who went overseas, but also of J.E.H. MacDonald, Franz Johnston, Arthur Lismer and Lawren Harris. The later success of the Group of Seven as a whole is related back to the experience of the two future members in France. For example, we are told that Varley "was not supposed to be there at all," but having overcome this hurdle, the war "made his career." Furthermore, such later landscapes of northern Ontario as Johnston's 1920 *Fire-swept, Algoma* (fig. 21), and

¹⁹ By my count, the Canadian War Memorials Fund has paintings by 105 painters and sculptures who could be considered traditional, compared to only 17 by artists who could be considered modern (R.F. Wodehouse, *Check List of the War Collection* [Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970].)

Jackson's 1920 *First Snow, Algoma* (fig. 22), with their stark tree stumps and logged-over hills, are, according to Maria Tippett, reflections of the battlefield landscapes of France. In the ten minute video-clip included in the exhibition, she states,

Most [Group of Seven] artists were exposed to the [war] paintings. They saw this imagery of this twisted, broken landscape ... again and again and again ... If you look at the paintings of Jackson and Varley, who had been there, you see the war-torn landscapes transferred to northern Ontario. If you look at the paintings of Lawren Harris ..., of Franklin Carmichael, Frank [sic] Johnston, artists who had not been at the front, but had seen the war paintings. They were affected too, they couldn't help but be affected, this imagery of these broken, amputated, headless trees, is in there ... part of the iconography of the Group of Seven. They didn't choose to paint these kinds of landscapes because they were looking for some kind of wilderness. If they wanted a wilderness motif that had been untouched they wouldn't have painted in logged-over areas in northern Ontario. They were finding an imagery that fit what they had seen either at the front or had seen in war artists' paintings.

Tippett does not explain why it was only Group of Seven members who were affected in such a way, and why other Canadian artists who had been at the front did not return to paint stark, logged-over, northern landscapes. Furthermore, she does not explain why it is only a relatively small number of Group of Seven paintings that show this type of iconography.²⁰ However, the exhibition seizes Tippett's thesis in spite of its flaws. The notion that the iconography of the Group of Seven is actually the iconography of the First World War was explicitly advanced by the curators outside of the video. In an interview Brandon stated,

What we are revealing [in "Canvas of War"] is the role of war in developing Canadian art. We have created a national myth that the art of the Group of Seven sprang from the Canadian land. But you can see elements of the destruction and barrenness of the bombarded Western Front in their great landscape paintings. Ignoring those origins is a disservice to our art history.²¹

In *Canvas of Conflict*, cultural historian Maria Tippett and historian Hugh Halliday are given a great deal of leeway to advance their opinions about the art of the Great

²⁰ In a search through the catalogue for the 1995 Group of Seven exhibition "Art for a Nation," of 128 post-World War One paintings by Group members only seven portrayed logged-over, "war-like" landscapes.

²¹ Laura Brandon quoted in Bruce Wallace, "The Art of War" *Macleans Magazine* 113 (14 Feb. 2000): 24.

War. However, the combination of Tippett's "scholarly" reflections and Halliday's humorous anecdotes is often jarring. While Tippett separates the soldier from his environment, launching into a discussion of "anime" and the individual's loneliness in the crowd, Halliday brings the soldier into the realm of the viewer by relating personalized accounts of each canvas. Tippett singles out Eric Kennington's painting *Mustard Gas*, a portrait of a gassed soldier lying in a hospital bed with a bandage over his eyes, as an example of the essential loneliness of the soldier. She also points to Wyndham Lewis's *Canadian Gun Pit* (fig. 23), noting that in this painting the soldiers behave like ants, referring again to anime, and adding a personal aside that "it must have been terrible." By contrast, Halliday attempts to popularize the works. He tells viewers that Georges Vanier, Governor General of Canada, claimed that he was the officer holding the gun in Albert Bastien's painting *Over the Top* (fig. 24), a work showing an officer encouraging his men as they climb over the parapet into no man's land. Casting the artist in the role of prophet, Halliday also claims that Byam Shaw's popular painting, *The Flag* (fig. 25), foreshadowed his own sons' deaths in the Second World War; Shaw had used both his sons as models for the work, one posed as a dead soldier wrapped in the flag, the other looking on and mourning. Halliday also advances what he describes as the "controversial opinion" that A.Y. Jackson's war works are "bad Jacksons," although unfortunately his explanation of why they are bad was apparently edited out. He finishes with a touching anecdote surrounding Inglis Sheldon William's painting, *The Return to Mons*, telling a story of a young Belgian girl from Mons, perhaps the girl in the painting, who was able to remember the words to "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" through four years of German occupation.

The reliance on personal studies also produces some awkward segues as the video moves back and forth between the commentators' treatment of the paintings and the narrative's stress on the importance of the collection to all Canadians. After Halliday's discussion of Byam Shaw's *The Flag*, Pinsent brings the narrative back to the need for a new gallery, stating, "[in contrast to] Shaw's eerie foreshadowing of his sons' death was Beaverbrook's vision of a beautiful domed gallery to house the collection." As

in the exhibition, the lack of a gallery for these works is presented as a travesty – a slight against those who created the collection, and a detriment to the memorializing of the First World War. In the video, this is heightened by the expressed opinion that famous British artist Augustus John never finished his massive canvas, which was to have been the centerpiece of the collection, because there was no gallery in which to put it. The unfinished work now resides, viewers are told, cut in half, with a doorway cut through it, in the music room of a rich Chilean's London abode. "John had seen little need to complete his great mural," says Pinsent, "without Beaverbrook's gallery to house it. So, in the end John's mural became its own memorial. An incomplete homage to a half remembered dream." How much better Canadians would have treated it, viewers are left to conclude.

The video ends with a plea to "find a place for these important works," a theme that will be picked up again in the second video. An attempt is also made to reconcile the opposing strands of traditional and modern, with Pinsent announcing over a backdrop of paintings by Richard Jack and Paul Nash,

[t]he reconstruction of events by the traditional artists had allowed the world to see the Canadians fight at Ypres and Vimy. The imagery of the moderns had conveyed the pitiful horror and hopelessness of Passchendaele. And through both of these two, traditional and modern alike, the collection not only kept the past as historical record, but gave artists a new view of the world around them.

Canvas of Conflict, originally shown on CBC Television, thus lays the groundwork for the exhibition's connection of the war art collection to the supposed need for a new war museum. By expressing disappointment over the lack of interest in, and the disintegration of funding for, Lord Beaverbrook's plans for a suitable gallery to house the CWMF, the video moves to the conclusion that Canadians are breaking faith by not supporting the quest for a new museum. Hence the need for a new exhibition space is clearly articulated and the video ends on this note. After a discussion of Varley's painting, *For What?*, the narrator states, "the question might well be asked of the collection itself. For what reason was it created? It rests today in the nation's capital, carefully preserved in vaults, as dark as the graves of those lost Canadians who lie

quietly beneath the rolling farmlands of France." Conflating the art with the dead soldiers suggests that, by leaving the paintings in vaults, out of public view, Canada is not keeping faith with those who died.

However, while all Canadians are chastised for breaking faith, only a small number of Canadians are actually represented in the video. As already mentioned, unlike the exhibition, in *Canvas of Conflict*, no attempt is made at an inclusive narrative. In the video, the contributions of First Nations, and non-British ethnicities are ignored. The contributions of women are dismissed in a single sentence sandwiched between a description of the home front and the ongoing work of the future Group of Seven members. Pinsent narrates this in a contradictory paragraph that denies the individuality of all those but the future Group members:

The individuals seemed to grow less and less important as time moved on. This was a war of factories. Behind the divisions at the front were other enormous armies of workers creating the tools of battle. While Canada's men waged war in the mud, Canada's women waged war in the factories and hospitals. And while Jackson and Varley laboured to complete their front line works, other members of the Group of Seven stayed at home and created from there...

Aside from a short commentary by Charles Hill on Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's industrial sculpture, the contributions of women are neglected, despite the fact that, at the time of the first CWMF exhibitions, the works dealing with the contributions of women were singled out in several newspaper articles.²

While the highlighting of a colony-to-nation narrative leading to the formation of the Group of Seven complements "Canvas of War," *Canvas of Conflict* emerges as an often contradictory and sometimes regressive commentary on the Canadian War Memorials Fund collection. Despite the writers' efforts to focus the narrative of the video entirely on the collection of war art, it becomes apparent that the art cannot be separated from the wider context of the Great War, or from recent interpretations of the conflict. In

² See for example, Barker Fairley, "At the Art Gallery – The Canadian Section of the War Pictures," in *The Rebel* (Dec. 1919): 123-128; "Women Artists' work exhibited," *Montreal Daily Star* 2 Oct. 1920: 30; "Memorial Exhibit Includes Work of Women Artists," *Montreal Herald* 2 Oct. 1920: 3.

contrast to recent, more inclusive, interpretations of war, *Canvas of Conflict* thus appears old-fashioned and backward-looking.

Canvas of War

The second video, *Canvas of War*, was produced three years after *Canvas of Conflict*, and, unlike the earlier production, makes a concerted effort to include the contributions of women (if not those of non-British ethnicities), and relies heavily on the statements of the artists themselves, which are presented in interviews and reconstructions. It is arranged in small, easy to comprehend segments, each prefaced by an intertitle taken from one of the artists' quotes. *Canvas of War* is also outwardly much less concerned than *Canvas of Conflict* with the Canadian war effort and the construction of nation, and relies far less on modern-day scholarly interpretation. Although it does reiterate the earlier video's emphasis on the Group of Seven by highlighting the help given to Second World War artists by the older A.Y. Jackson and Arthur Lismer, and by focussing on Lawren P. Harris, son of the Group member Lawren Harris, the main narrative surrounds a new group of Canadian artists who were not connected to the Group of Seven, especially Alex Colville, Charles Comfort, Molly Lamb Bobak and Bruno Bobak. Because many of these artists are still alive to recount their experiences of the war, no scholarly accounts like those offered by Halliday, Tippett and Hill in the first video are used to interpret the works. Instead, the highly personal accounts offered by the artists, their memories of fighting, working and painting on the front lines and home front present a very different narrative from that of the first video – one that also works against Brandon and Oliver's interpretation of the works as "depersonalized."

Canvas of War picks up where *Canvas of Conflict* left off – in the vaults at the Canadian War Museum. The lights are off and someone appears to be walking out, perhaps reflecting lack of interest in the collection. A voiceover states, "During the Second World War the government of Canada commissioned artists to record the

activities of the Canadian military.²³ Then, in a moment of intense drama, the light snaps on, the title comes up on screen, and the viewer is presented with a pastiche of canvasses and signatures, focussing attention, first, on the importance of the collection and, then, on the importance of the artists themselves. "Some were sent to Europe," the voiceover continues, "others painted the home front. In all, more than 5,000 paintings were produced." The combination of shots of the huge storage warehouse dissolving into closeups of the paintings, suggests that all 5,000 of these works are being kept from the public eye, and that Canadians are being denied access to the historical legacy they provide.²⁴

Outside the plea for a permanent exhibition space, the video is constructed, for the most part, in chronological order, with each segment focussing on a certain theme, such as the declaration of war, women in the army, the Italian invasion, D-Day, and the final victory in Europe. At the start of the video, the importance of war overshadows the importance of art, and we are told that Canadian artists signed up for war like "other Canadians." Unlike the first video, in *Canvas of War* the artist and soldier are presented as one and the same. War artist Robert Hyndham, for example, is introduced through his "movie star" good looks, and his modest comment that "My whole life was dedicated to painting before this war... I was intending to be an artist, not an aviator, but when the war came along I naturally had to do something, so I went in as a pilot, which worked out." Molly Lamb Bobak comments, "[b]y the third day [as a CWAC] I don't think you could pull me out of that army."

As the video proceeds, many of the artists interviewed also comment on the hardships and fear brought about by the war. However, their descriptions of suffering are often understated, particularly when compared to the hyperbolic descriptions of conflict

²³ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from *Canvas of War*, video, Sound Venture Productions, Ottawa, 2000.

²⁴ The vaults at the war museum, poor storage conditions, and lack of access to the collection is brought up again later in the video, this time in a clip that is included in the exhibition. In the section, artist Leonard Brooks is shown his work for the first time in fifty years. As he reacts in excitement, stating "all my children, all my children..." the camera pans over numerous racks of paintings, suggesting the storage of thousands of paintings out of the public's eye.

in the First World War video. Bruno Bobak, for example, relates what must have been a harrowing incident where he was forced to escape being strafed by a low-flying German airplane by jumping into a ditch. He describes falling on the body of a dead comrade, but adds, with a smile, "I was too chicken to get out." In a reconstruction, Miller Britain, describing his painting *Night Target, Germany* (fig. 26), in which a German city bursts into flames below Allied bombers, says, "A German city, under bombing, often looked like a casket of jewels opening up in some Walt Disney film. It was terrible, it was wicked, but there was a fascinating beauty to it." Descriptions such as these would not have been useful in the first video, where retrospective mud and blood descriptions of the war were used to demonstrate the need for a new artistic language to portray the horrors of the front lines.

Strangely, however, *Canvas of War* also attempts to build a narrative based on the dichotomy constructed between modern and traditional art. But, in contrast to the first video, where modern art is highlighted as the type of art best able to record the landscapes of the Western Front, in the second video this narrative is not continued. Instead, tension between modern and traditional art is presented as the root of a contemporary conflict between the National Gallery and the Canadian government. Modern art, the video suggests, was supported by the National Gallery through its director H.O. McCurry, while traditional art was championed by the government through army representative Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, who is known to have commented that "art [had] to be accurate right down to the placement of the screwheads on the Bren guns." As the ornery stickler for detail, Duguid is constructed as the antagonist in the video, and, while his support of Alex Colville is championed, his criticism of other artists, such as Will Ogilvie, is ridiculed.

Alongside the modern versus traditional debate, the video deals with the struggle to establish the Canadian War Records Collection, which moves seamlessly into the question of why, once the collection had been built at such an effort, it remains hidden away in vaults in Ottawa. In this case, *Canvas of War* picks up where *Canvas of Conflict* left off. The earlier video charged that Lord Beaverbrook had to beg Mackenzie King for

a letter of thanks for all his work done for the Canadian people, and the second video again places MacKenzie King in the role of an uncultured prime minister totally uninterested in preserving the war for posterity. While Canada was the first country to institute a war art program in the First World War, it was the last in the Second World War. Canadian actor R.H. Thomson provides the narration: "Three years into the war and still there is no war art program. From London, Vincent Massey, Canada's High Commissioner and longtime patron of the arts, presses his friend Mackenzie King for a program." Thus the hero who, according to the exhibition, gave Canadians the Canada Council, was directly responsible for the Second World War art collection. "Massey convinces King that the work of artists is ... required," continues Thomson, "if there is to be adequate record of Canada's war activities. Within months, the first artists, having completed basic officer training, make final preparations to go to Europe." It is also through Massey that the central vision of the Canadian War Records Collection is articulated. In the video, Lawren P. Harris remembers how he felt that cameras could do an equally good job recording the war, but was convinced of the importance of art when Massey told him, "when you do a sketch you put your feeling into it, whereas the camera captures what's there, but you can express it in other ways." Thus, in spite of the obsessive accuracy of much of the War Records Collection work, there is, according to Massey, a transcendental quality to the work done by Canadian artists, an idea that would still have resonance for viewers of the collection today.

The debate about modern and traditional art, and the struggle to establish the war art program provide the central narratives of the video. On the one side are Vincent Massey, National Gallery director H.O. McCurry, and the artists; on the other are Prime Minister MacKenzie King, Duguid and, more obliquely, the Canadian public (which has ignored the importance of these works). Although the video was supported by the war museum, the importance of the National Gallery is reiterated throughout the video, where it is presented as the champion supporting Canadian modern art in the face of a parochial public and media. The video's interpretation of the National Gallery's initial dislike of Alex Colville's work is a case in point. McCurry is quoted as having said that

Colville's ultra-realistic work was "too dreadful for words. Our reputations will be mud to future generations if better artists are not selected [for the CWRC]." His dismissal of the realistic work fits with the gallery's championing of "modern" art, but does not fit with the current day approval of Colville's paintings. Thus, McCurry's quote is represented in the video as humorous when Colville, who comes on screen, is able to laugh it off, saying that "I didn't like [A.Y. Jackson and McCurry] anyway." The humorous touch of this section is important as the dislike among the three is portrayed as a misunderstanding. We are led to believe that McCurry's dislike of Colville's work was personal, and had nothing to do with the work itself, and is not reflective of the gallery's policy toward Colville. More important to the video's narrative is Jackson's comment that "all of Duguid's suggestions are foolish," but had to be accepted in order to gain his support for the collection. Without Duguid's (and hence the army's) support, there would have been no art program. The video suggests that the traditional nature of the collection was not determined by the choice of the artists, but by the strict controls of the army. The implication is that if the National Gallery had had more control, the work produced would have been at the forefront of the art scene.

Duguid's interest in accuracy is easily constructed as bordering on obsessive through a highlighting of some of his more conservative opinions. His dismissal of Will Ogilvie's paintings of Canadian operations in Italy is a case in point. The viewer is informed that Ogilvie's watercolours were hailed by just about everyone, including Vincent Massey, but that "enthusiastic reception is tempered by one dissenting voice." The camera then pans over a black and white photograph of Duguid, making him appear almost comically evil as a voiceover states in Duguid's "voice" "[Ogilvie's] work is not liked. It is regarded as being too slight, too casual, and not studied enough." The implication is that, first, Vincent Massey's opinion counts for more than Duguid's, and that, second, in spite of Duguid's statement, where he appears to speak for many, he could only have been speaking for himself. Interestingly, at the time he made this statement, Duguid was somewhat of a hero to the Canadian people, having just

published (after a lengthy delay) the Official History of the First World War.²⁵ Within the video however, he provides a convenient antagonistic character to explain why the works in the collection seemingly retreated from the modernist impulses evident in the work of the Group of Seven.

The National Gallery is also portrayed in *Canvas of War* as the heroic employer of female artists, a duty the government neglected by hiring only Molly Lamb Bobak (and her only after the termination of conflict). "There is no official policy," says R.H. Thomson, "but women are not selected as war artists." Pegi Nicol MacLeod and Paraskeva Clark, however, painted on National Gallery Commissions, and the video hints at the importance to these women of the employment. "To me it represented a sort of painting holiday," says Pegi Nicol MacLeod, "an orgy, sans housework. Of course it's a year's work or more, not two months..." The video then goes on to quote the same letter by Paraskeva Clark used in the exhibition, where she describes her feeling that women serving in the CWAC were able to keep their minds off the war through the escape of work. Her opinions are supported later in the video by Molly Lamb Bobak who states that it was easier to be a CWAC than to wait at home for a loved one. More than the narrative of the video, however, which simply states that there was prejudice against the hiring of women, it is Lamb Bobak's interview, combined with the quotes from Clark and MacLeod, that reveal not only the difficulties faced by women, but also their successful struggles to overcome unvoiced prejudice. Lamb Bobak, for example, tells how she used to hitchhike to Ottawa to "beg" McCurry to hire her, but that eventually it was A.Y. Jackson, acting on her behalf, who saw that she was hired by the government.

After the discussion of women painters, the video becomes increasingly moody. One of the central problems of the war art is introduced at this point. Reading a letter from Charles Comfort, the narrator notes that war is a "dense, exhausting element where sound, sound only existed." How can two dimensional painted works deal with a traumatic conflict that overtook all the senses? An exhibition of war art obviously cannot

²⁵ Vance 167-170.

recreate conflict in toto, and "Canvas of War" substituted music for gunfire, replacing excitement and terror with pathos. The video attempts to add gunshots, bombs and air raid sirens at appropriate moments, but the end result is a sensory pastiche rather than the recreation of a war zone. In an effort to overcome this conundrum, the video and exhibition rely on the opinion, expressed by Vincent Massey, that the transcendental quality of the art makes up for a lack of sound and smell. In *Canvas of War*, Jack Nichols, for example, is seen in a black and white image lost in concentration on the painting in front of him. "What I remember most about the war," says the Nichols voiceover, "is the feeling of being overwhelmed." As Nichols's remembrance continues, the bleak image of his painting is accompanied by gun shots in the background and close up shots of Nichols's work. "I couldn't imagine introducing colour into any of these pictures," Nichols says, "I think of black and white as colour, and sometimes it gives off colour ... I don't try to describe things. You can't put what I do into words, that's why I do paintings."

From this point, the dialogue becomes increasingly morose, moving inevitably toward a discussion of the atrocities of war. Robert Hyndham tells how he was "filled with disgust" at the conflict, and remembers thinking "I hate this war," while Lamb Bobak comments, "it was a terrible war." Eventually the narrative arrives at Bergen Belsen concentration camp, where Aba Bayefsky says, "[it] was my intention... to make sure this was put on record." A voiceover, which, although attributed to Bayefsky, does not appear to be his voice, states, "When I got there I realized that this was a moment of decision for me. My life as a Jewish young man, had known anti-Semitism [but] nothing of this sort ... I realized that this is where I should be. I wasn't assigned to that, but that's where I was and where I intended to stay." In turn, Bayefsky brings up Charles Goldhammer's sketches of burned airmen. Not included in the original show due to an oversight, and not included in "Canvas of War" due to fragility (although one is included in the catalogue), Goldhammer's sketches provide the ultimate in scopophilial sublimity. It is an interesting note on which to end, and one that works with the general anti-war take of the exhibition. The video is summed up through a series of quotes from the artists, a

summary of the feelings created by war (fear, tension, excitement), and a final summary of the art. It ends on a happy note, announcing that Molly Lamb and Bruno Bobak, both of whom were commentators in the movie, were married after returning to Canada from their final painting assignment. The fitting last line is Bruno Bobak's, who states, "whatever happened, we're in the history books and we're there forever now...."

Given Bobak's statement it deserves comment that both *Canvas of Conflict* and *Canvas of War* are notable for their lack of conventional historical analysis. Thus, in *Canvas of War*, there is no discussion of the battles, the home front, or the political situation. Concurrently, there is no discussion of French-Canadian anger over conscription, the mistreatment of First Nations and ethnic groups during and after the wars, and the internment of Japanese-Canadians and other enemy aliens. As in the exhibition, problems not confronted in the art are simply not dealt with.

Because neither of the videos are directly connected to the exhibition, they afford the opportunity to look at how seemingly competing historical narratives can actually support the same dominant-class position. Although *Canvas of Conflict* is much more concerned with creativity as a result of the horrors of war than is the exhibition, both ultimately construct the First World War as the domain of the victorious British-Canadian (male) soldier. Similarly, while both *Canvas of War*, the video, and "Canvas of War," the exhibition, rely on artists' accounts to construct a narrative of the Second World War art program, the normative qualities of the artists' accounts serve similarly to maintain dominant class narratives, in spite of seemingly inclusive display strategies.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Who is to blame [for a lack of knowledge of Canadian history]? First of all, the schools, which have been influenced by the modern academic preference for social rather than political history. In their zeal to teach the story of ordinary people, they are neglecting to teach the story of great individuals and great events.... Government, too, is at fault. Eager to promote multiculturalism at a time of heavy immigration, Ottawa has deliberately played down this country's roots and let part of our national heritage slip away. Tomorrow's national birthday, for example, now bears the insipid name Canada Day instead of the old, more resonant Dominion Day.

Richard Addis, *Globe and Mail* 30 June 2001¹

In 1999 and 2000, the years that "Canvas of War" ran at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, support for the sort of political history advocated by Richard Addis was certainly present. Newspaper articles commenting on Canadian "ignorance" of history, often placed the blame on a pluralist, "politically correct," school system and the failure of multiculturalism to create a cohesive national identity.² The idea of Canadian "ignorance" was complemented by a myriad of popular and high culture programming, publications and events concerned specifically with Canadian history. Thus, as "Canvas of War" was showing in Hull, the First World War in particular became increasingly important in the ongoing debate about Canadian nationality. CBC Television launched its highly anticipated and popular series, *Canada: A People's History*,³ and *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story* took the Canadian heroine Anne of Green Gables to the Western Front in a search of her husband Gilbert Blythe. In Margaret Atwood's award winning novel,

¹ Richard Addis "Our Neglected National Past," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A14.

² Addis, 30 June 2001: A14; Murray Campbell, "For Most Canadians, Our History is a Mystery," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A1, A7; David Frum, "Historian Won't Let Canadian Schools Off the Hook," *Financial Post* 25 Apr. 1998: 38; Edward Greenspon, "There's Good Reason to Celebrate this Canada Day," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A15; John Habron, "War Paint," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 11 Nov. 2000: D16-17; Christopher Moore, "Become a Past Master in Canadian history in 10 Easy Lessons - Before the Next Poll," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A7; Peter Worthington, "Let Us Not Break Faith," *Chalottetown Guardian* 14 Nov. 1997: A6.

³See for example "Canada: a People's History" website, <<http://history.cbc.ca/history/>>, and "Carleton Practicum in Applied History, the reaction to Canada: A People's History" website, <<http://www.carleton.ca/historycollaborative/>>.

The Blind Assassin, the protagonist's father had fought and been injured in the Great War, while Jane Urquhart's novel *The Stone Carvers*, was centered around the construction of Walter Allward's Vimy Ridge Memorial. Concurrently, the National Film Board released its extensive, political historical account of the First World War in the series *Far From Home: Canada and the First World War*, and a millennial *Globe and Mail* survey found the Battle of Vimy Ridge to be one of the five most important events in Canadian history. Meanwhile, the Return of the Unknown Soldier and the government funding of a new war museum received national front-page coverage in both the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*, as well as in many regional newspapers. As Barney Danson, war veteran and head of the committee for securing funding for a new war museum commented, "Something happened on November 11 [1999] that was different from what I have ever seen since the [Second World] War. It was right across the country – biggest crowd ever on Parliament Hill in living memory, the same at the Cenotaph in Toronto and at Hart House, at places across the country and in schools."⁴

These events provided the backdrop to "Canvas of War," adding to and benefiting from the display of the supposedly "hidden" canvasses.⁵ In much the same way that many visitors commenting on the exhibition felt that it was essential to "see" this part of Canadian history, many writing on the larger context of the exhibition conflated a supposed waning of Canadian historical knowledge with a need to focus on the "facts" of Canadian history.⁶ In a recent review of Jane Urquhart's novel *The Stone Carvers*, reviewer Sandra Martin stated, "[Urquhart] was troubled by the fact that nobody seems to know or care about the artist who built the Vimy memorial ... That was the final impetus: our ignorance about our own history."⁷

In turn, comments such as this are often coupled with a conscious or

⁴ Barney Danson in Graham Fraser, "Danson Lived Dream," *Toronto Star* 17 March 2000: A8.

⁵ Dan Bjarnason, "War Art on Display," *The National*, CBC Television, 11 Feb. 2000.

⁶ Addis, 30 June 2001: A14; Campbell, 30 June 2001: A1, A7; Frum, 25 April 1998: 38; Greenspon, 30 June 2001: A15; Habron, 11 Nov. 2000: D16-D17.

⁷ Sandra Martin, "Carving Memories," *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 5 April 2001: R3.

unconscious quashing of counter-narratives. In a second review of Urquhart's novel, the reviewer, foregoing subtlety for emphasis, argues essentially that competing narratives are not a possibility:

Given Urquhart's popularity and stature in France [as winner of the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger and a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters] and the impression *The Stone Carvers* is likely to make there, I can't think of a better rebuttal to offer Quebec's minister of culture than this book. It is proof (as if any were needed) that Ontario has a culture as distinct as Quebec's. No one outside Ontario could have written such a compelling account of the multiple strands of its European connections, and I doubt if anyone else inside that province could have written a better one.⁸

Within the context of the review, the writer's statements suggest that Ontario's memory of the First World War has been subsumed into a Quebec quest for recognition as a distinct culture. A stroll through "Canvas of War" would prove otherwise.

Comments such as those on Urquhart's novel were also found, as already mentioned, in many of the reviews of "Canvas of War."⁹ However, as historian Hugh Halliday, narrator in the video *Canvas of Conflict*, commented in a letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*, the war art collection has actually been shown numerous times. Halliday notes that in the 1960s, when former war artist Charles Comfort was director of the National Gallery, an entire floor of the gallery (then in the Lorne Building in Ottawa) was dedicated to the war art collection. Furthermore, Halliday notes, in 1977, the war art exhibition "A Terrible Beauty" "was launched with at least as much publicity as that associated with Canvas of War.... The complete show toured Canada from coast to

⁸ T. F. Rigelhof, "Stone Dazzling," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 7 April 2001: D5.

⁹ Robert Amos, "Canada's Wartime Contribution Recorded on Canvas," *Victoria Times-Colonist* 12 Nov. 2000: B11; Bjarnason, 11 Feb. 2000; Graham Fraser, "Horrors of War Explode on Canvas," *Toronto Star* 19 Feb. 2000: M14; Paul Gessell, "Fixing History – With a Q-tip – Canada's War Record on Canvas is Now Ready for Display," *Ottawa Citizen* 5 Feb. 2000: E1; Habron, 11 Nov. 2000: D16-D17; Susan Hallett, "Museum Treasures Must be Displayed," *Ottawa Citizen* 13 Feb. 2000: A17; Erik Oliemans, "War Art Exhibit Shows Need for New Museum, letter to the editor," *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 Feb. 2000: A13; Melanie Scott, "War's Enduring Artistic Legacy," *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 Feb. 2000: E1; Stephen Smith, "The Art of War: Armed with Brushes, Paints and Chisels, Artists Created a Record of Canada at War," *National Post* (Toronto) 4 Mar. 2000, *Weekend Post Arts*: 5; Bruce Wallace, "The Art of War," *Maclean's Magazine* 113 (14 Feb. 2000): 22-25.

coast for almost two years, appearing in more than a dozen major centres."¹⁰ He also points to exhibitions of Alex Colville and Pegi Nicol MacLeod's war work, among others. Finally, Halliday notes, "A check of the [Ottawa] *Citizen* files will ... turn up repeated stories "discovering" the war art collection every few years."¹¹ Indeed, a fear for certain narratives of Canadian history is also apparent before the 1990s, and even before the official introduction of multiculturalism.¹² Similarly, the First and Second World War, as well as other historical events, have provided ample material for novelists, historians and film makers throughout the decades. Thus, even as Halliday demonstrated that the supposed lack of access to the war art collections is untrue, the reproduction of "crisis" and the showing of the supposedly "hidden" collections in "Canvas of War" had already paved the way for funding for a new war museum.

On 17 March 2000, Heritage Minister Sheila Copps announced a \$58.2 million contribution toward the construction of a new war museum in Ottawa.¹³ The Royal Canadian Legion and the Canadian Museum of Civilization added contributions of \$500,000 and \$7 million respectively.¹⁴ The two-year campaign thus ended successfully two months after the opening of "Canvas of War." Until this point, the construction of the new war museum had been mired in controversy. Three years previously, a \$12 million extension to the existing War Museum had been proposed, with the construction of a permanent Holocaust memorial exhibition. However, vehement protests from veterans

¹⁰ Hugh Halliday, "We Didn't Just Discover Unknown War Art" *Ottawa Citizen* 14 Feb. 2000: A13.

¹¹ Halliday, 14 Feb. 2000: A13.

¹² See p.3, n.9, above.

¹³ Fraser 17 March 2000: A8. Many veterans may have felt the same way as Bill Hunter, who commented, "The Holocaust was a horrible thing, it was a horrible thing, but it was not related to the Canadian war effort" (Bill Hunter quoted in Allan Thompson "Veterans Winning Battle, Museum to Look at 'Other Option' to Holocaust Gallery," *Toronto Star* 3 Feb. 1998: A1).

¹⁴ Richard Foot "Ottawa Donates \$58.2 Million Toward New War Museum," *National Post* (Toronto) 17 March 2000: A12.

convinced of the "unCanadianess" of such a memorial shelved the project.¹⁵ After announcing the cancellation of the memorial, then chairwoman of the CMC corporation Adrienne Clarkson announced that the entire space of the museum would be devoted to "telling the story of the Canadian military past."¹⁶

Two years later, in 2000, director Jack Granatstein suggested the sale of Hitler's limousine, one of the War Museum's most famous objects, for a suggested cost of \$20 million, which would partially cover the cost of a new art gallery to house the museum's extensive collection of war art. Again, the public outcry at the sale of the limousine, and the fear that the limousine would fall into the "wrong hands," prompted the museum to drop its sale plans.¹⁷ Eventually the War Museum had to depend on the government for funding. "It's clearly a difficult sell," said Granatstein, referring to fund raising, "Part of it is simply the name. If we were the Canadian Peace Museum, it would be easier. But I think the name should stay – partly because Canadians think that all Canada has done is peacekeeping. It is a useful way to remind people that it actually fought wars."¹⁸ Heritage Minister Sheila Copps agreed, stating, "It was the overwhelming consensus of all

¹⁵ Fraser, 17 March 2000: A8. Jewish groups were later also said to have felt that the War Museum was not the appropriate place for a memorial.

¹⁶ Adrienne Clarkson, quoted in Graham Fraser, "No Holocaust Gallery for War Museum," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 19 Feb 1998: A5. Many veterans, and eventually the war museum, supported the notion that Canadians had participated neither as perpetrators nor as victims of the Holocaust. This is ironic, given that, had Canada not instituted an exclusionist immigration policy during the war years aimed at keeping Jews out of the country, a critical mass of Jewish Holocaust survivors might exist in Canada sufficient to warrant inclusion of a Holocaust memorial within the national museum. (Irving Abella, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* [Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982].)

¹⁷ Peter Mansbridge, "Hitler's Car Stays in the Museum," *The National*, CBC Television 11 Feb. 2000.

¹⁸ Granatstein in Graham Fraser, "The Front-Line Fight to Fund War Museum," *Toronto Star* 24 Feb 2000: A1, A26. After the cancellation of the Holocaust memorial, reporter Dan Gardner wrote that the War Museum was running into trouble because of the Canada's definition of itself as a peaceful nation. He supported the cancellation of the memorial and wrote that Canada's status as a peacekeeper "[is] a lie. From the World Wars to Korea to the Gulf War, whenever we have agreed that a nation was aggressively in the wrong and a coalition was prepared to fight, Canada joined – and was often among the first to strap on the tin helmet. Neutrality is for the Swiss and pacifism for the Hare Krishnas" (Dan Gardner "Veterans Win Battle, Still Losing the War," *Ottawa Citizen* 25 Feb. 1998: A17).

members of all political parties, that the Canadian war story needs to be told."¹⁹ The impact of "Canvas of War" on this decision should not be underestimated. Commenting on 6 November 2000, Brandon notes,

When Dr. Granatstein became director of the Canadian War Museum it was with the view of having a new war museum, and, since the war art collection is considered very highly amongst the collections of the War Museum, it was appropriate that it be showcased in order to show the strength of the war museum collections and their need for a new, permanent home.²⁰

In connecting all these events related to the First World War, Patrick Nagle's editorial in the *Vancouver Sun* is worth quoting at length. It demonstrates not only his own position, but also what he perceives to be the position of the rest of the population:

Since February 11 [2000], a portion of the [war] museum's collection of war art has been displayed at (irony of ironies) the Museum of Civilization. These paintings are a true national treasure. As a creative record of the tempering of the national steel, they are priceless.

The best of the art does not glorify war; it colours the true image of death and destruction. Vancouverite Orville Fisher ... was a war artist ... Alex Colville, the internationally renowned mystical realist from Nova Scotia, was a war artist. Lawren Harris and A.Y. Jackson of the Group of Seven, were war artists. On the open market their paintings are worth millions.

As nominal custodian of this hoard, Prof. Granatstein rightfully wants to display it. To this end he proposed to sell [Hitler's] Mercedes.

The ensuing uproar defeated the plan and we will never know if the \$20 million valuation on the vehicle was correct... If it were true then the sale would have paid more than 30% of the cost of a proper gallery for the war artists. There should be no mistake about this.

Hitler's Mercedes was not a Canadian prize of war. It was purchased on the open market and should have been sold back into it. Prof. Granatstein knew this and must be complimented.

It is the Canadian people and their history who are poorer. They have been told a car is worth more than a painting.²¹

In Nagle's editorial, the use of the First World War and of the art collection as a symbol of national identity becomes evident. While Hitler's limousine may be an important

¹⁹ Sheila Copps in Richard Foot, "Ottawa donates \$58.2 Million Toward New War Museum" *National Post* (Toronto) 17 March 2000: A12.

²⁰ Laura Brandon, quoted in *Trans Canada*, television program, Cpac, 6 Nov 2000.

²¹ Patrick Nagle, "War Museum Director Unjustly Catching Flak Over Car," *Vancouver Sun* 21 Feb. 2000: A13.

artefact, its lack of Canadian associations made it seemingly inappropriate to display in a Canadian museum of war. Similarly, we are led to believe that learning about Canada through artists' perceptions of the war is essentially more beneficial to Canada than learning about Hitler. In other words, it appears that because the limousine is not a "Canadian prize of war," it is worthless to Canada. Again, it can be assumed that the visitor so disturbed by the marginalization of the Jewish experience within the exhibition would be somewhat perturbed to hear that the pedagogical opportunities offered by Hitler's bullet-damaged limousine were less than those of a landscape of Vimy Ridge.

The announcement of the new war museum came at a time when the First World War was already in the minds of many, not only through "Canvas of War," but also through the upcoming Return of the Unknown Soldier and one MP's quest to have a Red Ensign flown by Canadian troops at Vimy Ridge returned from the Imperial War Museum in London to Canada. While the latter story may not appear to have been particularly newsworthy, within the context of Coppins's announcement of funding for a new museum, the event was examined in minute detail. "A poignant, war ravaged symbol of Canada's birth as a nation hangs in a dark corner of a British museum," wrote reporter Mike Blanchfield, "and a Liberal MP has launched a crusade to bring it home."²² In this case the fervour of the newspaper can be contrasted with "Canvas of War"; Byam Shaw's painting (fig. 25), showing a dead soldier wrapped in the Red Ensign at the feet of a British lion statue and surrounded by mourning relatives, was not included.²³ While it had been the most popular canvas in the 1919 CWMF exhibition, by 1999 its cloying sentimentality was seen as over the top – until contrasted with the newspaper coverage of the attempt to recover the Vimy Ridge flag. In the "crusade" to regain the Red Ensign two important stereotypes are conflated – the importance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge in Canadian history and the importance of the flag as a symbol of Canadian nationality. MP

²² Mike Blanchfield, "MP Battles for Return of Flag that Flew at Vimy," *Montreal Gazette* 20 Mar. 2000: A10.

²³ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997) 108.

David Pratt is quoted as saying “[the flag] is a wonderful symbol of Canada’s coming of age. A lot of historians have talked about Vimy Ridge as one of the critical points in the development of Canadian nationhood.... Flags are such important symbols - this flag in particular from Vimy Ridge, where 3,600 Canadians were killed.”²⁴ Pratt saw the flag when he was visiting the Imperial War Museum in London, and decided that it should be in Canada. Granatstein was enlisted in support of the project, writing to the museum and demanding that the flag be returned. “It’s ours,” he wrote, “Vimy’s ours.”²⁵ Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, Pratt and Granatstein also wanted to have the flag draped across the coffin of the Unknown Soldier in the May 2000 ceremony.²⁶

Indeed, in the ceremony, the narrative forwarded in “Canvas of War” was repeated on a much larger scale. The event had been suggested at a Royal Canadian Legion meeting as a way of marking the millennium, and was quickly embraced by both the government and media.²⁷ Throughout Canada the event grabbed the front pages of national and local newspapers. The coverage was entirely positive, often jingoistic, and aggressively inclusive. While many reporters noticed the presence of non-Caucasian Canadians along the parade route and at the monument, all viewers were placed in an overarching narrative of Canadian nationality defined by the supreme sacrifice of the First and Second World War soldiers. One commonplace description of the event was written by John Robson in the *Ottawa Citizen*:

By the time the parade reached Parliament Hill, it was clear the crowd was sizable. It was also, as our leaders like to boast, and did later at the Memorial, diverse. They were different sizes, shapes, sexes, ages and colours. If the guy right in front of me had relatives who made the supreme sacrifice, they more likely did so at Imphal than Dieppe. But that doesn’t mean the crowd was diverse in the sense that the term is often used. Indeed, it was startlingly monolithic in its belief that the Unknown Soldier had not died in vain... And in front of me three little kids, a brother and two

²⁴ David Pratt in Mike Blanchfield, 20 Mar. 2000: A10.

²⁵ Mike Blanchfield “It’s Ours. Vimy’s Ours,’ War Museum Director Says,” *National Post* (Toronto) 20 Mar. 2000: A9.

²⁶ Mike Blanchfield, 20 Mar. 2000: A9.

²⁷ Ron Corbett, “Thousands Pay Tribute to Unknown Soldier,” *Ottawa Citizen* 29 May 2000: A1.

sisters who were clearly part-white, apparently half-East Indian and definitely all-Canadian. I hope there'll never be another war, but if there is, I think they will know they have to go for the same reason the Unknown Soldier had to go."²⁸

These sentiments were echoed in Governor General Adrienne Clarkson's official address, where she noted "We do not know whose son he was. We do not know his name. We do not know if he was a MacPherson or a Chartrand. He could have been a Kaminski or a Swiftarrow."²⁹ Thus, the Unknown Soldier was constructed as every-Canadian, and, while the bones of the Unknown soldier might belong to Swiftarrow, his symbolic face was that of the portrait of Major Learmonth found in the exhibition "Canvas of War."

Attracting 20,000 people, the Return of the Unknown Soldier became a rallying point for the "Canadianization" of the wars. Furthermore, it also provided a direct link to the cultural capital of "Canvas of War," and Adrienne Clarkson noted in her speech that "We have a wealth of witnesses in Canada to describe to us the unspeakable horror and frightening maelstrom that war brings. What that First World War was like has been described in our poetry, novels and paintings. Some of our greatest artists came out of that conflict, able to create beauty out of the hell that they had seen."³⁰

In this way, the Return of the Unknown Soldier became an event around which all Canadians could symbolically define themselves, and in turn it was connected to the permanent display of the war art at the new museum. Journalist Ron Corbett argued that "the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier would become one of our most important national symbols," in much the same way that Granatstein and Danson suggested that the new Canadian War Museum should become an important symbol of nationality, necessary to showcase the "national treasure" of the art collection.³¹

²⁸ John Robson "A Powerful Salute to Freedom," *Ottawa Citizen* 29 May 2000: A5.

²⁹ Adrienne Clarkson quoted in "He is Every Soldier in All of Our Wars," *Ottawa Citizen* 29 May 2000: A5.

³⁰ Adrienne Clarkson, 29 May 2000: A5.

³¹ Ron Corbett, 29 May 2000: A2.

Mixed up in the discussions surrounding the Return of the Unknown Soldier, and the fear for Canadian history is the idea of the "good citizen." One anonymous editorial in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* stated "[The grave of the unknown soldier] becomes a hallowed spot where people of good conscience are moved to thoughts that border on the noble and the sublime."³² This idea is echoed in Granatstein's book where he claims that teachers no longer teach the sort of curriculum he believes creates a strong country. "Canadian students [know] almost nothing of their own country," he writes, "How then could they become good citizens?"³³ A similar comment appeared in an opinion column written on Canada Day 2001: "Someone once said to me that the function of school is to create good citizens," said Greg Hobbs, head of history at a suburban Ontario high school, "Well, if you're not going to emphasize your history program, I don't know how you're going to get good citizens just with maths and sciences, no art and nothing cultural to go with it."³⁴ Being a "good citizen" apparently demands sufficient knowledge of Canadian history.

This terminology is also found in the outline of the Canadian Museum of Civilization's mandate, written by former director George Macdonald:

One way in which the CMC makes itself meaningful is that, as a shrine containing national treasures, it can be seen by Canadians as an appropriate pilgrimage destination where their experience of national culture/identity will help transform them into 'good citizens.' All Canadians should feel a certain obligation to visit their national capital, and to visit the CMC as an integral part of that pilgrimage³⁵

In turn, the apparently diverse support given to the Return of the Unknown Soldier led, during 2000 and 2001, to a media highlighting of several stories concerning positive aspects of Canadian military activity, contrasted with fears for Canada's historical

³² 'A Fitting Tribute: Editorial,' *Halifax Chronicle Herald* 13 April 2000: C1.

³³ J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1998) 23.

³⁴ Quoted in Murray Campbell "Canadians Modest to a Fault About Past," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A7.

³⁵ George MacDonald and Stephen Aisford, *Museum for The Global Village* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1989) 59.

knowledge and the future of the country.³⁶ As the Canadian Mint introduced a new ten dollar bill with illustrations of Canadian peacekeepers, a red poppy and a verse from the First World War poem "In Flanders Fields," editorials were written admonishing Canadians' "woeful ignorance."³⁷ In turn, Canadians' "ignorance" was contrasted with reports such as that of *Globe and Mail* reporter Edward Greenspon, who wrote, in June 2001, with regard to the government funding of a new Canadian military cemetery, "A more recent trend, but ... [an] encouraging [one], is an apparent return to the veneration of Canadian heroes. More than 50 years after the Second World War, our government finally consecrated a national cemetery this past week."³⁸ Greenspon connects this encouraging trend to the Return of the Unknown Soldier, where Canadian pride became apparent to him for the first time, and then goes on to connect all Canadians to war veterans through Canadians' stoic perseverance in the face of economic recession. "As with war veterans," he writes, "Canadians have returned from their fiscal battlefield keen to believe their efforts will serve a higher purpose..."³⁹

Not surprisingly, given the publicity surrounding "Canvas of War" and its wider social medium, the Canadian war artists program has been resurrected, this time in the guise of the Canadian Forces Artists Program. Although the participants have not been

³⁶ Edward Greenspon, "There's Good Reason to Celebrate this Canada Day," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A15.

³⁷ Murray Campbell, "For Most Canadians Our History is a Mystery," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 30 June 2001: A1.

³⁸ Edward Greenspon, 30 June 2001: A15.

³⁹ Greenspon, 30 June 2001: A15. What is interesting about Greenspon's analysis is that it closely connects a fear of American economic supremacy with a need to establish a narrative of Canadian history. Thus, it is not surprising to see big business such as RBC Dominion Securities, Imasco, *History TV*, Consumer Gas, Seagrams Ltd, Alliance Communications and the Donner Foundation lining up behind institutions such as *Historica* and the Dominion Institute, that have made it their mandate to support the "revival" of Canadian history. The Dominion Institute (of which Jack Granatstein was director) pays for the annual "Self-Knowledge" quizzes, the dismal results of which invariably receive front page coverage, and provide the material for books such as Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History?* It should also be noted that the Donner Foundation provided the support for "Canvas of War." (Paul Webster, "Who Stole Canadian History?" *This Magazine* 33 [March-April 2000]: 29-31.)

announced, the program will hire artists, sculptors, writers and actors.⁴⁰ The CAFCAP had been shut down in 1995 in the wake of a government commission set up to investigate the beating death of a Somalian youth by members of the Canadian Air Borne Regiment, which was subsequently disbanded.⁴¹ "The [CAFCAP] was a very nice thing," Lieutenant-Commander Jean Marcotte said, "but with the budget cuts we are now in the necessity business, not the nice thing business."⁴² Without the funding of \$200,000 per year, the program was cut, only to be reinstated six years later in a more accepting environment.

Epilogue

"Canvas of War" is slated to spend the next few years touring North America, stopping at every provincial gallery along the way.⁴³ The next stop for the exhibition is the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. While the main narratives of the exhibition will remain unchallenged, AGO curator Anna Hudson plans to disrupt the idea of a static definition of nationality by creating a "Debriefing Room" in the AGO's Signy Eaton Gallery, which will be situated at the end of the "Canvas of War" exhibition. The "Debriefing Room" is intended to "encourage visitor reflection on the experience of war conveyed by the "Canvas of War" exhibition."⁴⁴ There will also be contributions from veterans who will staff the "Debriefing Room," and a section of the room will be devoted to the "experience of the 'other' in wartime," using an installation of the internment camp paintings of Kazuo

⁴⁰ Canadian forces program drafts artists

<http://www.infoculture.cbc.ca/archives/visart/visart_06072001_warart.phtml> cbc visual arts.

⁴¹ Bill Cameron, "Canadian War Artist Rips Works," *The National*, CBC Television 16 Apr. 1999.

⁴² Quoted in Canadian Press and staff, "War Artists Suffer as Ottawa Moves to Control Budget," *Globe and Mail* 25 March 1995: C19.

⁴³ The largest canvasses, such as Richard Jack's, and Walter Allward's Vimy Ridge sculptures will not be included as they are too fragile to travel. Thus galleries will be able to make up the space with works in their own collections and will be able, in many ways, to interpret the core exhibition on their own terms.

⁴⁴ Anna Hudson, letter to the author, February 2001.

Nakamura. One of the goals of the "Debriefing Room" is "to ensure that any exploration of the topic of war and conflict contains multiple voices and perspectives."⁴⁵ Nakamura's works will be supported by printed testimonial and/or video/audio records of statements on the nature of war designed to "capture diverse points of view."⁴⁶

Whether the second venue will be more successful than the first in addressing a diversity of viewpoints remains to be seen. A comparison of the exhibitions obviously cannot be conducted here, but could provide an interesting study of regional differences that come into play when examining the impact of the wars on Canadian nationality. Should the coverage of the exhibition in the national press be an indication, however, it is unlikely that the narratives of the exhibition will differ greatly from venue to venue. As it stands, "Canvas of War" at the Canadian Museum of Civilization achieved its aims of popularizing the nation's war art collections and securing funding for a new museum. In the context of this study, it was also useful in demonstrating some of the difficulties inherent in contemporary efforts on the part of curators and cultural institutions in Canada to reconfigure the ethnic nationalism of a former Canada in light of multiculturalism today.

⁴⁵ Debriefing Room (Adjunct Installation Proposal), Art Gallery of Ontario, February 2001.

⁴⁶ Anna Hudson, letter to the author, February 2001.

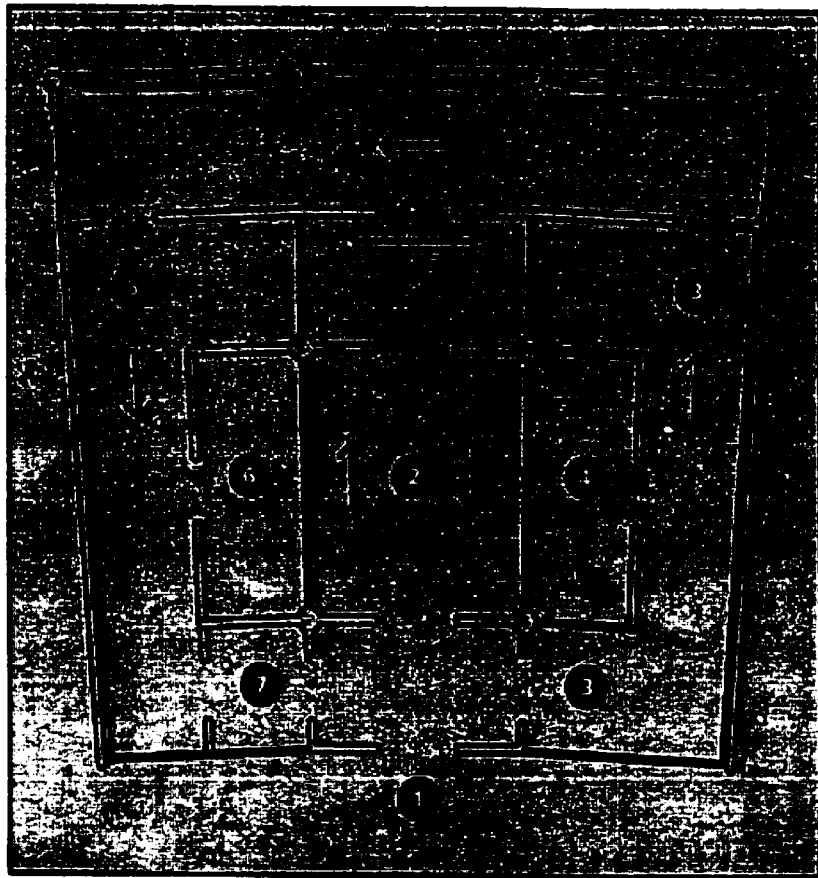


Figure 1 Guide to the Exhibition "Canvas of War," Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, 2000. Key as follows: 1. Entrance to the exhibition 2. Treasures Gallery 3. First World War section 4. *Canvas of Conflict* video room 5. Second World War section 6. *Canvas of War* video room 7. Epilogue room.



Figure 2 Richard Jack, *The Second Battle of Ypres, 22 April to 25 May 1915*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 371.5 x 589.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8179).



Figure 3 Richard Jack, *The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Easter Monday, 1917*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 366.1 x 604.5 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8178).



Figure 4 William MacDonnell, *Sappers Clearing a Deadfall*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 162.6 x 162.8 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program.



Figure 5 F.H. Varley, *For What?*, 1918. Oil on Canvas, 147.2 x 182.8 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8911).

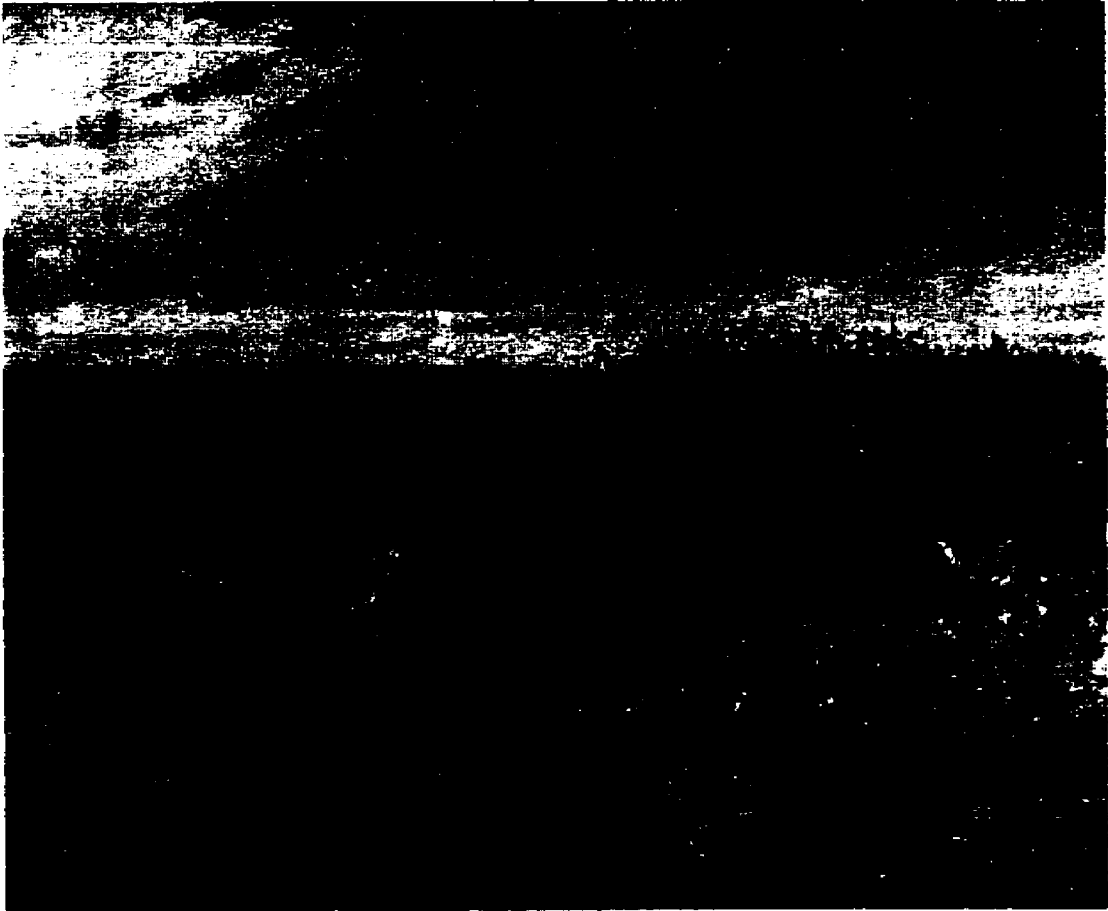


Figure 6 Maurice Cullen, *Dead Horse and Rider in a Trench*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 112.0 x 143.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8140).

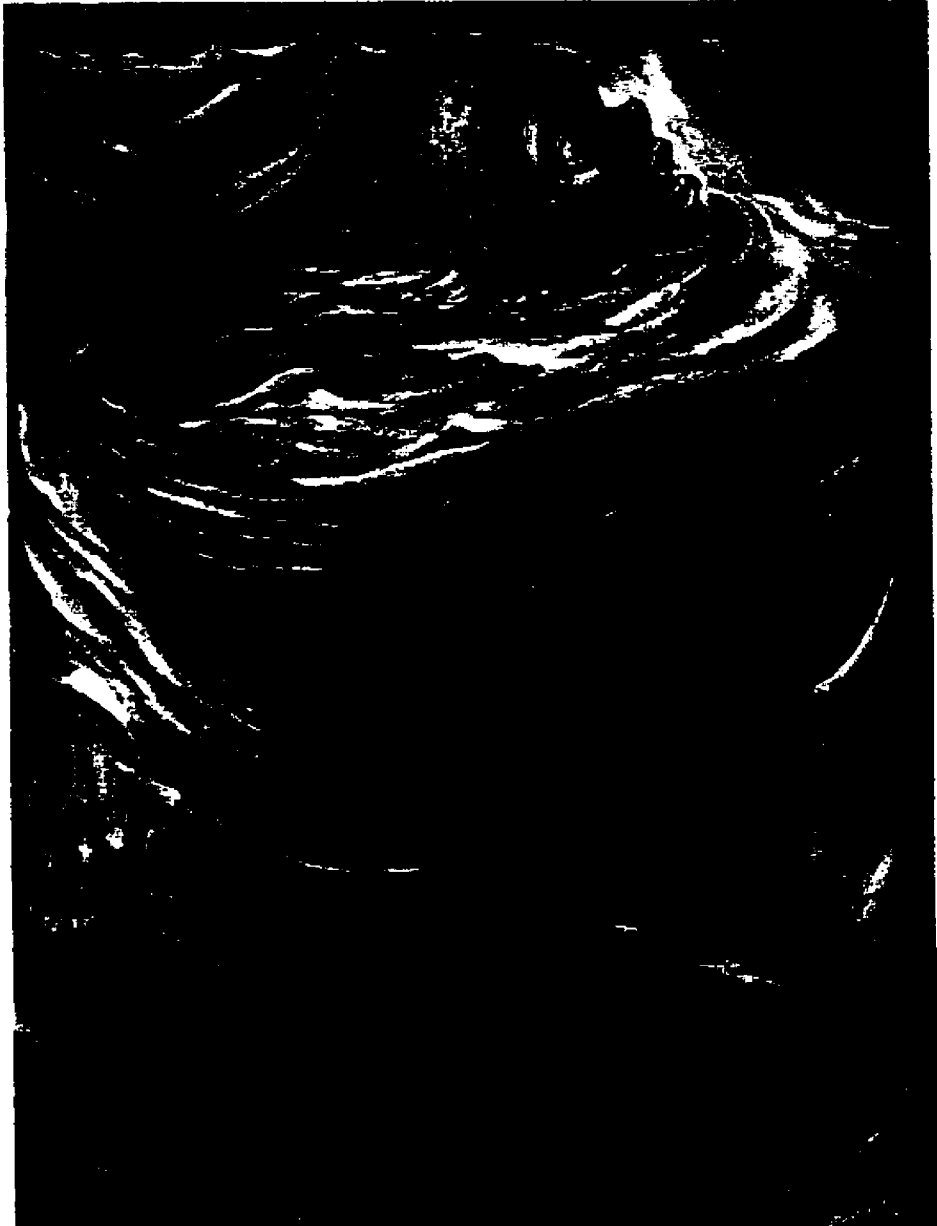


Figure 7 Jack Nichols, *Drowning Sailor*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 61.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (10505).



Figure 8 Charles Sims, *Sacrifice*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 415.2 x 409.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8802).



Figure 9 Eric Kennington, *The Conquerors*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 297.8 x 242.8 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund (8968).



Figure 10 A.Y. Jackson, *A Copse, Evening*, 1918. Oil on Canvas, 86.4 x 111.8 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8204).



Figure 11 Paul Nash, *We are Making a New World*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 71.2 x 91.4 cm. Imperial War Museum, London.



Figure 12 James Quinn, *Major O. M. Learmonth, the Victoria Cross*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 76.5 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8682).

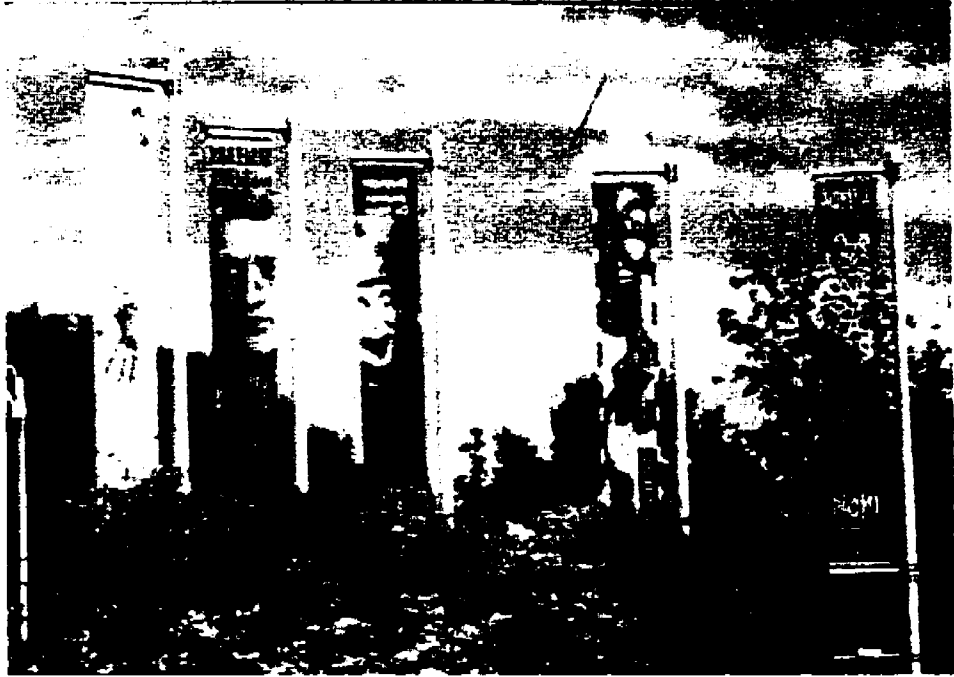


Figure 13 "Canvas of War" banners, outside the Canadian Museum of Civilization, August 2000. Photograph courtesy Fraser Robertson.



Figure 14 Henry Lamb, *Portrait of Trooper Lloyd George Moore*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (7833).



Figure 15 Mabel May, *Women Making Shells*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 182.7 x 214.9 cm.
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8409).

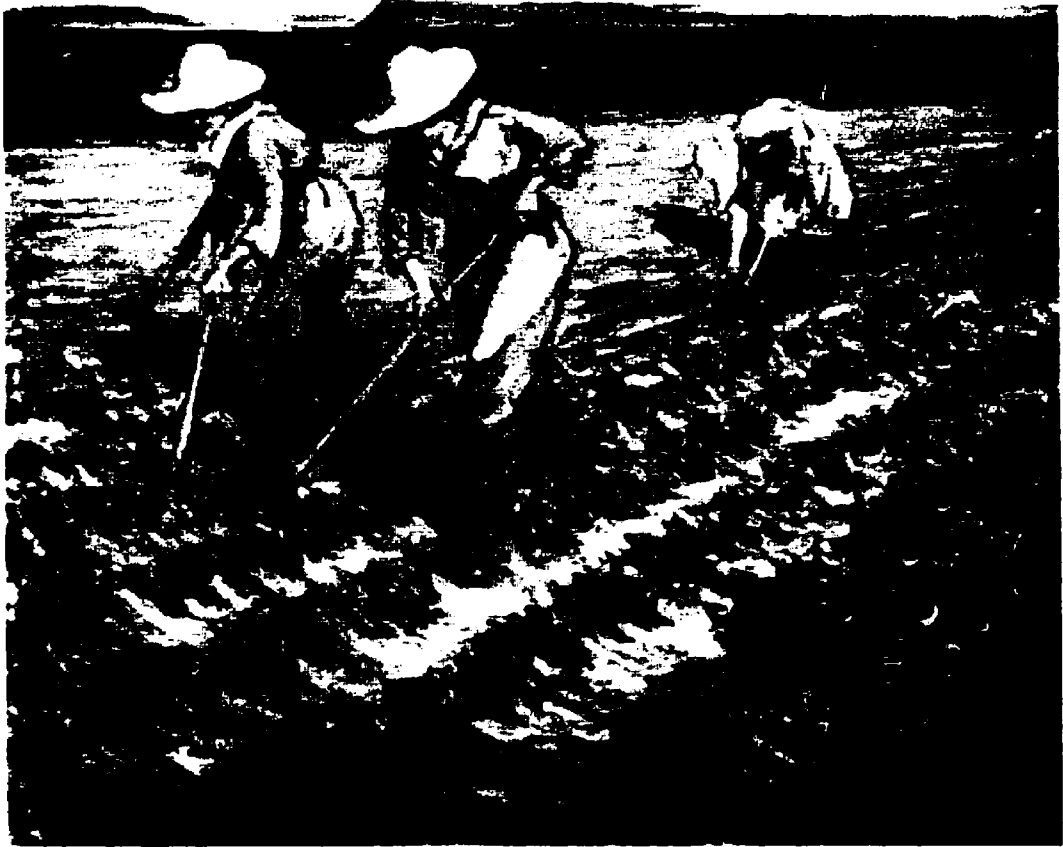


Figure 16 Manly MacDonald, *Land Girls Hoeing*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 152.8 x 194.0 cm.
Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8390).

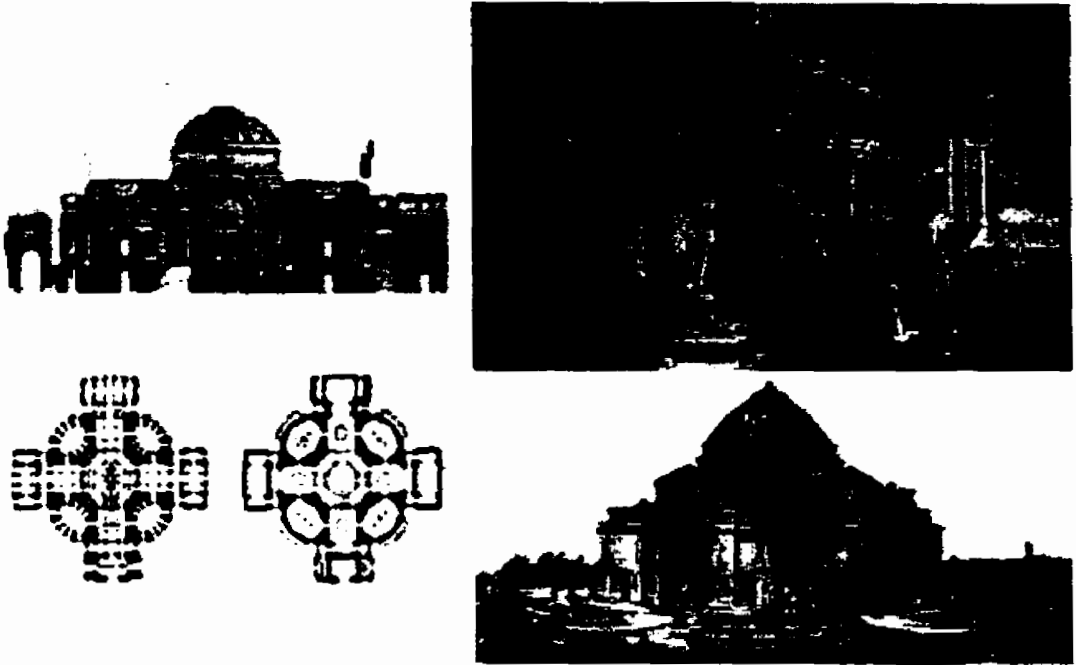


Figure 17 E.A. Rickards, *Design for the Canadian War Memorials* , 1919. Reproduced in *The Builder*, Sep. 1920. Drawing of interior held at the Royal Institute of British Architects, London.



Figure 18 Jack Nichols, *Negro Sailors Returning on Board a Canadian Ship* , 1943. Graphite and oil washes on paper, 59.2 x 73.8 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (10522).



Figure 19 Alex Colville, *Bodies in a Grave, Belsen*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 76.3 x 101.6 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (12122).



Figure 20 Molly Lamb Bobak, *Canteen, Nijmegen, Holland*, 1945. Oil and ink on canvas, 51.6 x 61.1 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (12017).

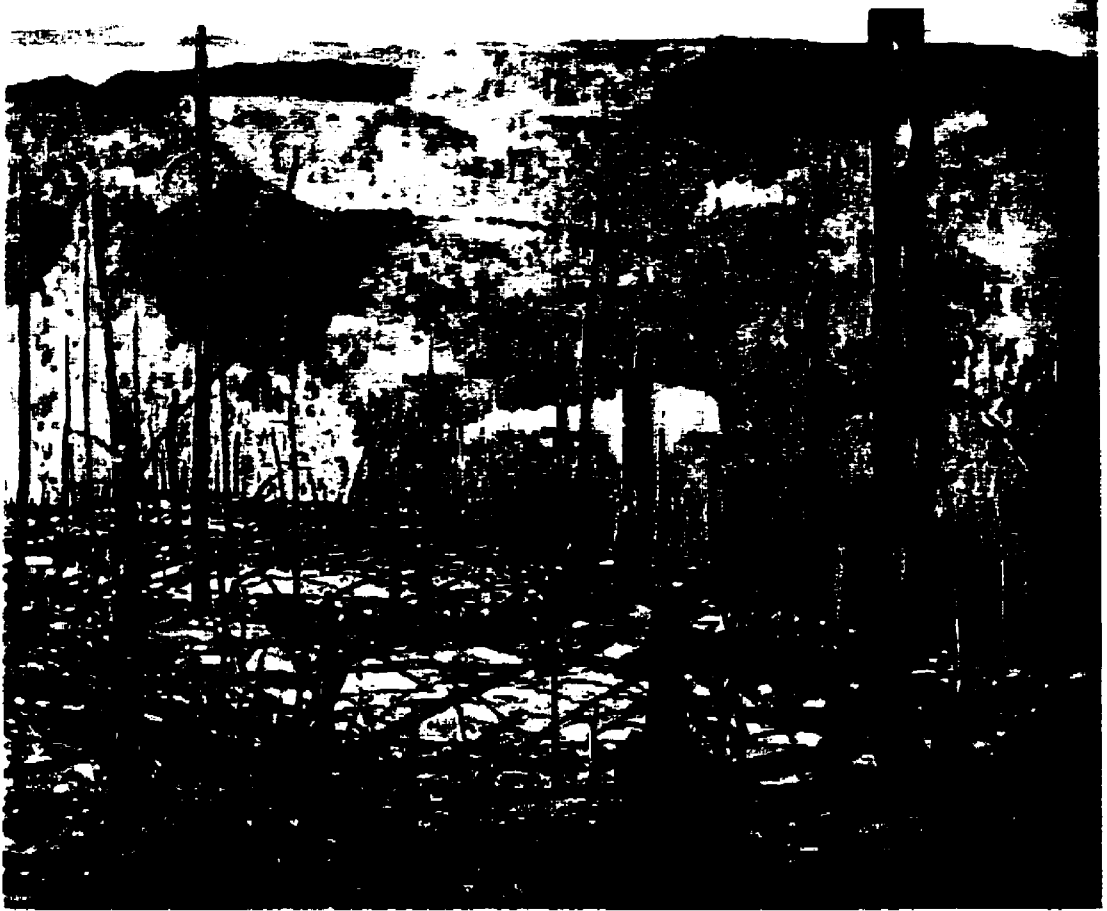


Figure 21 Franz H. Johnston, *Fire-swept, Algoma*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 127.5 x 167.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1694).

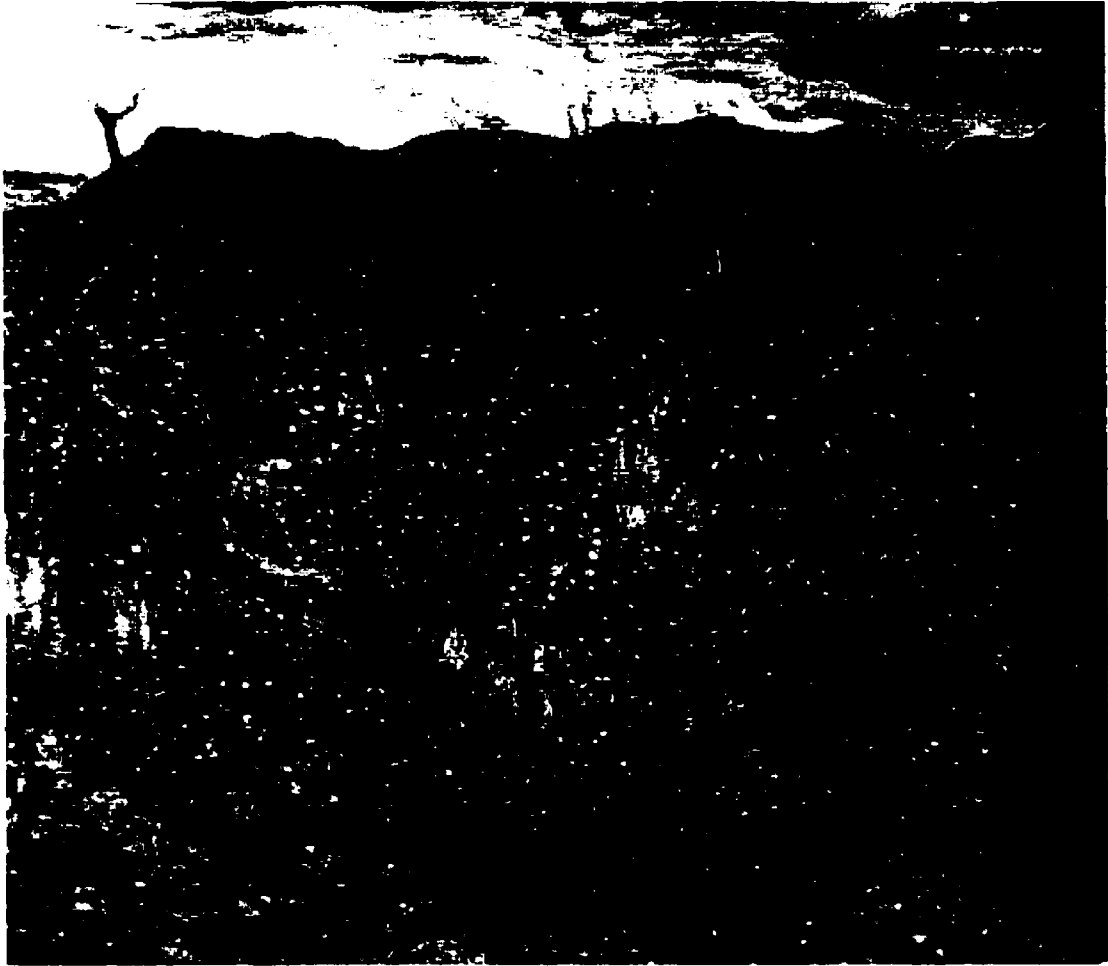


Figure 22 A.Y. Jackson, *First Snow, Algoma*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 107.1 x 127.7 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario (1966.7), gift in memory of Gertrude Wells Hilborn.



Figure 23 Wyndham Lewis, *A Canadian Gun Pit*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 305.0 x 362.0 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Figure 24 Albert Bastien, *Over the Top, Neuville-Vitasse*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 229.6 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8058).

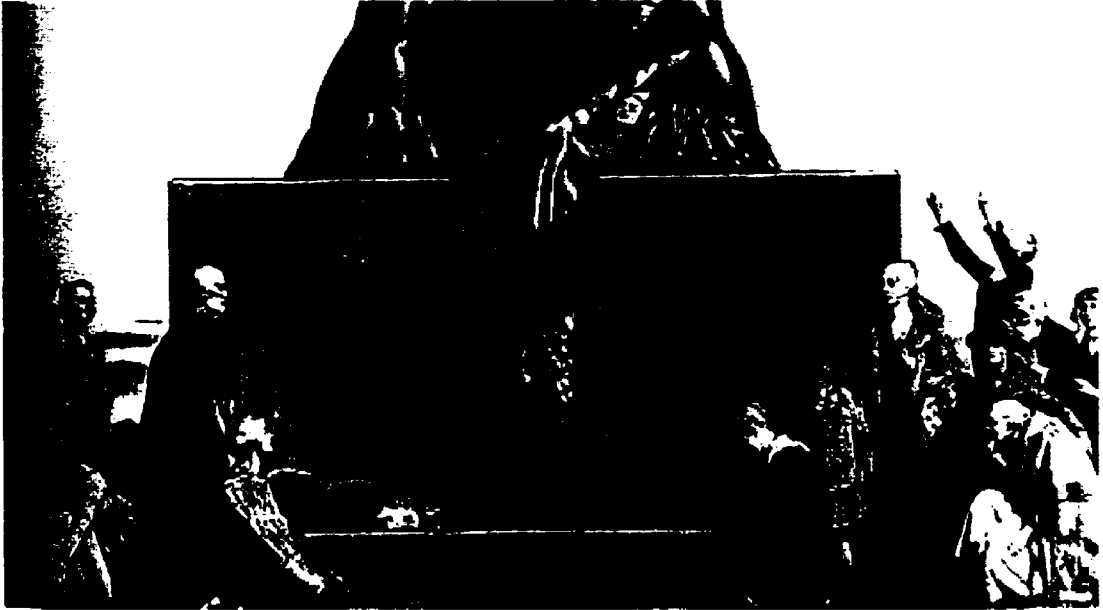


Figure 25 John Byam Lister Shaw, *The Flag*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 198.0 x 366.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Canadian War Memorials Fund Collection (8796).



Figure 26 Miller Brittain, *Night Target, Germany*, 1946. Oil and egg tempera on Masonite, 76.5 x 61.0 cm. Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canadian War Records Collection (10889).

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