CANADIAN PAINTING IN	THE	THIRTE
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6. Regionalist Manifestations in Quebec

As was English-speaking Montreal, the French-speaking art community was dominated by senior Royal Canadian Academicians. The painters Suzor-Coté and Edmond Dyonnet and the sculptors Alfred Laliberté and Henri Hébert were the most publicized artists in Quebec. Of the leading painters of the twenties, Clarence Gagnon was in Paris preparing illustrations for *Maria Chapdelaine*, and Adrien Hébert was painting reticent urban scenes of the port of Montreal. The Quebec tradition of religious art, revived by the teachings of the French Symbolist Maurice Denis, was continued by Ozias Leduc and the younger artists Rodolphe Duguay and Paul-Émile Borduas.

One of the more popular contemporary Quebec artists at this time was Marc-Aurèle Fortin. Born in Sainte-Rose in 1888 he first studied under Ludger Larose and Edmond Dyonnet and then in Chicago, New York, and Boston. He returned to Canada about 1914; however, it was only in the mid-twenties that he began actively to pursue a painting career. His favourite themes were the large elms in small Quebec villages, hay wagons on country roads, and the flowing curves of Quebec farmhouses. Like that of the Group of Seven in Toronto, Fortin's style derived from the Art Nouveau decorative art of the turn of the century, specifically the work of Frank Brangwyn.²

Around 1930 he painted a series of views of Montreal seen from the area around his Notre Dame Street East apartment. *Landscape at Hochelaga* (c. 1931, cat. no. 80) breaks from the more delicate, earlier landscapes; the paint is applied with more firmness, the composition is more complex, and the contrast of colours is more striking. In its interplay of vibrating lines of colour and rolling rhythm it is close to J.E.H. MacDonald's *Gleams on the Hills*, ³ though lacking the more sombre moods of the latter's work.

In 1935 Marc-Aurèle Fortin spent some time in France and upon his return moved to Sainte-Rose. For a period in the mid-thirties he painted over a black undercoat⁴ giving his work of this period an almost brutal quality. In the late thirties and all through the forties he painted in the lower Saint Lawrence area and in the Gaspé around Saint-Simon.⁵

Marc-Aurèle Fortin was a regionalist artist in the same sense as the Group of Seven. While less vocal or self-conscious than the members of the Group, exploring and interpreting different areas of the province, he transformed the landscape into an expression of a national identity.

The traditional way of life of the rural inhabitants of Quebec played an important rôle in the concept of a French-Canadian identity, historians and writers having equated its preservation with the struggle against assimilation of the French in North America. Quebec artists also

continually returned to the themes of rural life. Horatio Walker, in the manner of Jean-François Millet, idealized the farmers and their Christian faith. James Wilson Morrice, A.Y. Jackson, and Marc-Aurèle Fortin concentrated on its more picturesque qualities while Clarence Gagnon, in his illustrations for *Maria Chapdelaine*, explored its human drama. Now a younger generation of artists, continuing and transforming this tradition, looked at it with new eyes.

Born in Switzerland, André Biéler was brought to Canada by his family in 1908 at the age of twelve. He fought with the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry during the First World War, was gassed at Passchendaele, and returned to Montreal very ill. He spent the next year in the southern United States recuperating and painting, and during the summers of 1920 and 1921 he studied with Charles Rosen and George Bellows at the Summer School of the New York Art Students League in Woodstock, New York. The teaching there was greatly influenced by Cézanne, with a concentration on figure work. Working with Bellows, a member of the American 'Ash Can School,' also predisposed Biéler to a greater consciousness of his social environment.

André Biéler left for Europe in October 1921 and the following spring worked with his uncle, Ernest Biéler, in Switzerland. The art of Ernest Biéler shows many similarities with that of Alexandre Jacovleff and Adolf Milman, the teachers of Lilias Newton and Edwin Holgate, employing similar compositional devices and concentrating on careful drawing and structure. Also of great interest to André was his uncle's work in fresco.

After returning to Canada, inspired by the regionalist literature that had developed in France during the twenties, Biéler sought a region of Quebec where he could live and paint. His first choice was the Gaspé; however, finding the winter too severe, in the fall of 1927 he moved to the Île d'Orléans, Horatio Walker's terrain, where he remained for three years.

This period on the Île d'Orléans determined the themes and character of André Biéler's work for the next decade. Fascinated by the traditional way of life of the farmers, he completed numerous sketches of women baking, religious processions, and people at church. Some of the single figures are close to Holgate's work both in colouring and composition; however, Biéler was more concerned with the depiction of groups of people and their interrelationships.

In 1930 Biéler left the Île d'Orléans, ¹³ and rented a studio in Montreal. Recognizing the importance of the Studio Building to the Toronto artists, Biéler, with Edwin Holgate and Lilias Newton, found a sponsor to fund a

similar effort in Montreal; however, the project fell through. He soon met John Lyman, recently returned from France, and the plans for a studio building turned into a school, the Atelier.¹⁴

The staff of the Atelier consisted of John Lyman, André Biéler, Elizabeth Frost, George Holt, ¹⁵ and Kenneth Crowe – with Hazen Sise as chairman. ¹⁶ The first year classes were held in Elizabeth Frost's apartment with about a dozen pupils, ¹⁷ and the following autumn quarters were found in the building occupied by the Montreal Repertory Theatre. ¹⁸ Efforts were made to plan joint activities with the theatre, and a production of André Obey's *Noé* included sets and costumes by André Biéler in traditional Quebec materials and designs. ¹⁹ However, the school had few students, finances were difficult, and it closed in the spring of 1933. ²⁰

For the next few years André and his wife Jeannette Meunier designed furniture and interiors utilizing Quebec handicrafts. ²¹ Wanting to have more time to devote to his painting, André Biéler moved to Sainte-Adèle in the fall of 1935 and the following year obtained a position as artist in residence at Queen's University. Coming from a family of teachers he fitted into his new job with ease and was to remain there until his retirement in 1963. ²²

Stimulated by the work of his brother, Jacques Biéler, one of the founders of the League for Social Reconstruction, André Biéler became concerned about the rôle of the arts in society. Looking to the United States and Mexico he saw artists involved with their communities and with contemporary political and social issues, even offering direction to the people through their art. He found Canadian artists obsessed by geography with no reflection of social concerns or idealism.²³

In his own art André Biéler increasingly concentrated on his human environment. In *Corpus Christi Procession, Sainte-Adèle* (1936, cat. no. 81) the figures, integrated with the landscape, are still subordinated to its rhythms. In *Before the Auction* (1936, cat. no. 82) the figures are more individualized and become the dominant theme of the work. He leaves behind the decorative rhythms of the Group of Seven for a greater concern for the structure and reality of the people.

Just as Horatio Walker, inspired by the work of Millet and in the spirit of nineteenth-century Christian socialism, ennobled the labourers of the Île d'Orléans, André Biéler, following the model of Diego Rivera and the Marxist art of the w.p.a., sanctifies the rural family in *Gatineau Madonna* (1940, cat. no. 83). With this increasing idealization, Biéler attains a greater surety of expression, combining the fluidity and the structure of the earlier works in a unified whole.

André Biéler's interest in the rural life and folk arts of Quebec was shared by a group of artists and historians working in the lower Saint Lawrence region. Marius Barbeau, the noted ethnologist, had been studying the art and social customs of Quebec since the mid-twenties, organizing annual folk festivals at the Château Frontenac in Quebec City where traditional songs and dances were revived and crafts displayed. Gérard Morisset, at the Musée de la Province de Québec, was preparing important studies on the history of art in Quebec and in 1934 began the massive inventory of Quebec arts. ²⁴ Working with Barbeau and Morisset were the artists Jean Paul Lemieux, Jean Palardy, Jori Smith, and Stanley Cosgrove.

This interest in the traditional folk arts was parallelled by the appearance of the Murray Bay Primitives – chief among whom were the Bouchard sisters. In the United States the cult of primitive or naïve artists had been initiated by 'progressive' artists interested in the work of the Douanier Rousseau and the eccentric Louis Elsheimius, the untrained artist being seen as an expression of pure creativity unhampered by academic restraints. During the thirties, with the popularity of the American Regionalists, the primitive artists reached a wider public as examples of a regionalist, native art unsullied by foreign influences. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first sponsor of the Charlevoix or Murray Bay Primitives was an American, Patrick Morgan, 25 who organized an exhibition of their work in New York in 1937. 26

Jean Paul Lemieux's interest in the folk arts of Quebec began at a fairly early age. Born in Quebec City, he first visited the Charlevoix area in 1921²⁷ and while a student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal illustrated several novels based on regionalist and historical themes.²⁸ In 1929 he visited France, travelling in Brittany and the Basque area, and in Paris met Clarence Gagnon.²⁹ Returning to Montreal, he formed, with Jean Palardy and Jori Smith (fellow students at the École des Beaux-Arts), a commercial art studio that survived six months before disbanding.30 After spending some time travelling in the United States he returned to the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal where he studied wood engraving under Edwin Holgate and took life classes at Holgate's studio in the evenings. Lemieux's landscapes from this early date show a strong influence of Holgate - with their smoothly flowing, though solidly structured forms.³¹

After teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts for two years, in 1935 he secured a new post at the École du Meuble. The Quebec government had organized this school the previous year³² to improve the quality of the crafts made and sold in Quebec, with one eye on tourism, as well as to provide a solution to rural poverty. While conservative

in its reliance on traditional crafts and values, the École du Meuble under its director, Jean-Marie Gauvreau, was to become the most progressive art school in Montreal.

At the École du Meuble, Jean Paul Lemieux worked with Marcel Parizeau, professor of architecture, through whom he discovered the artists of the School of Paris.³³ He broke from his earlier style to develop a more personal expression, a greater freedom of colour and paint and a slightly brittle, linear brushstroke seen in *Landscape in the Eastern Townships* (1936, cat. no. 84).

From 1935 Lemieux spent most of his summers in Charlevoix county with Jori Smith and her husband. Jean Palardy, especially after 1937 when he started teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts in Quebec City.³⁴ With Marius Barbeau they collected furniture, pottery, and carvings and spent a great deal of time with the Bouchard family and the other artists at Baie Saint-Paul. Lemieux became extremely interested in folk arts and by consequence such fifteenth-century Sienese artists as Giovanni di Paolo. The stylistic simplifications as well as the sincerity and simplicity of expression appealed to his modernist interests. He also saw in the folk arts a truly native and proletarian production, a breaking away from the Fine Arts. Just as the Mexican artists had incorporated native art forms into their politicized art, Jean Paul Lemieux wanted to relate his art to the social and political life of the people around him.

In an article he wrote for Le Jour Jean Paul Lemieux denounced the isolationism and conservatism of art teaching in Quebec and the decadence of church decoration. He praised the mural work of the Mexicans and W.P.A. projects in the United States for their social and educative rôle and for their employment of younger, more modern artists.³⁵ In his own work he turned away from landscape to anecdotal and satirical depictions of country life, the most successful of which is Lazarus (1941, cat. no. 85). In composition and theme this work has many parallels with Jock Macdonald's Indian Burial, Nootka (cat. no. 38); however, Jock Macdonald creates a more naturalistic depiction with a greater concentration on landscape. Jean Paul Lemieux allegorizes by the combination of multiple events in one composition, as in the Sienese works he so admired. The slightly comical parishioners patiently listen to the sermon while in the graveyard, the Lazarus of the priest's sermon rises from the dead symbolizing the resurrection of the family shot down on the country road by the parachutists. In this work Jean Paul Lemieux raises the anecdotal genre of social realism to the level of religious symbolism. It is unfortunate it was never incorporated in a church decoration.

Jean Paul Lemieux's attitude to rural life was very

different from André Biéler's. Both were city-born and city-based, viewing the country from a distance; both artists were socially and politically committed; however, where Biéler idealizes, Jean Paul Lemieux satirizes. Perhaps Lemieux's more intimate contact with the reality of rural poverty in Quebec at the height of the Depression made it less easy to romanticize the farmer's life.

Jori Smith and Stanley Cosgrove also were attracted to the Charlevoix area, the former by its inhabitants, the latter by the country life and people. Jori Smith first studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal though she left in 1929, rejecting its academic training. After the commercial studio with Jean Paul Lemieux proved unsuccessful, she studied for a while with Edwin Holgate. All during the thirties, she and Jean Palardy spent the summers at Baie Saint-Paul, painting and collecting crafts and furniture, and from November to April, in Montreal surviving on a few dollars a week and the generosity of friends. ³⁶

Like Pegi Nicol MacLeod, Jori's passionate nature and deep humanitarian concern got her involved in the work of the League for Social Reconstruction and she avidly followed events in Spain during the Civil War. Jori's essential humanism also attracted her to the children of Charlevoix County. They were poor and often ill with tuberculosis, and their sad faces fascinated her. *Mlle Rose* (1936, cat. no. 86) still shows the influence of Holgate's emphasis on structure and form, yet the freer quality of the brushwork presages the almost violent Expressionism of her later work. However, it was only after Pellan's arrival from France that she broke away from the muted tones of her Beaux-Arts training and was able to purify her colour.³⁷

Stanley Cosgrove also joined the Palardys and Lemieux at Charlevoix in the summers during the late thirties. Born of an Irish father and French-Canadian mother, Cosgrove spent four years studying drawing at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal and one year with Edwin Holgate at the Art Association. 38 Like his other pupils, Cosgrove praises the seriousness of Holgate's teaching and his concern for the formal qualities of his art.

During the summer of 1936, with money given him by Huntley Drummond, ³⁹ he spent four months painting in the Gaspé. The following three summers he joined the Palardys and Lemieux at Baie Saint-Paul collecting furniture and painting the farms and people of the area. Much of his work parallels the American genre painting of the period; however, in *Madeleine with Short Hair* (1939, cat.no. 87) he stresses the plastic qualities of the figure with an almost crude strength of brushwork. The muted colours and coarse texture however impose a restraint

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

that creates an expression of serenity belying the actual boldness of the work.

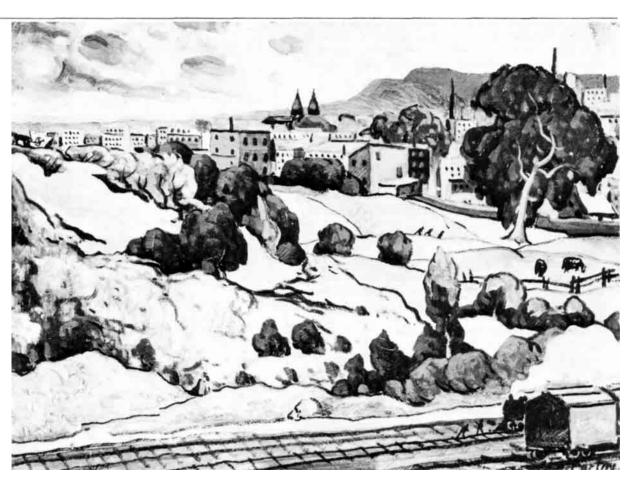
Like Jean Paul Lemieux, Cosgrove was interested in the American and Mexican revival of mural painting. In 1938 he decorated the church of Saint-Henri in Montreal with Maurice Raymond, and the following year assisted Edwin Holgate with the murals for the Canadian pavilion at the New York World's Fair. Though the David Scholarship that Cosgrove received in August 1939 was for studies in France, the war intervened. In December, he went to New York; however, finding that city too expensive, he travelled to Mexico where he was to remain for four years.

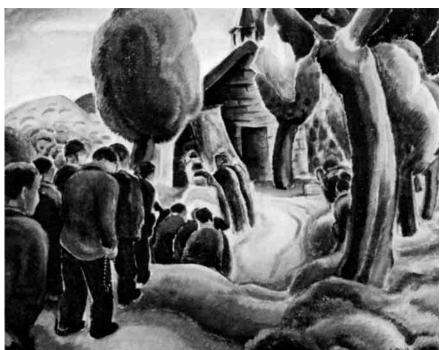
- Louis Hémon, Maria Chapdelaine (Paris: Éditions Mornay, 1933).
 Illustrations by Clarence Gagnon.
- Jean-René Ostiguy, Marc-Aurèle Fortin (exhibition catalogue) (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, [1964]).
- 3. Gleams on the Hills (1920, oil on canvas; 32 x 34 in., 81.3 x 86.4 cm) in The National Gallery of Canada. See R.H. Hubbard, ed., The National Gallery of Canada. Catalogue. Paintings and Sculpture. Volume III: Canadian School (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 191 repr.
- 4. 'Marc-Aurèle Fortin,' La Presse (14 November 1936).
- 5. Jean-René Ostiguy, op. cit.
- Frances K. Smith, 'The Chronology,' in *André Biéler 50 Years: A Retrospective Exhibition 1920 1970* (exhibition catalogue) (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1970).
- Interview with André Biéler, Glenburnie (Ontario), 18 December 1973.
- 8. Frances K. Smith, op. cit.
- See J.B. Manson, Ernest Biéler / Peintre Suisse (Lausanne: Éditions la Concorde, 1936).
- Interview with André Biéler, Glenburnie (Ontario), 18 December 1973.
- 11. Frances K. Smith, op. cit.
- 12. See André Biéler, Le Gars au Cormoran, Gaspé (1930, oil on canvas; 26 x 20 in., 66.1 x 50.1 cm, collection Dr and Mrs Albert Fell, Kingston; repr. in Francis K. Smith, op. cit., fig. 16) and Edwin Holgate, The Lumberjack (1926, oil on canvas; 25-3/4 x 21-1/2 in., 65.4 x 54.7 cm, Sarnia Public Library and Art Gallery; repr. in Peter Mellen, The Group of Seven [Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1970], p. 166).
- 13. Frances K. Smith, op. cit.
- 14. Interview with André Biéler, Glenburnie (Ontario), 18 December 1973
- 15. George Holt later worked on the W.P.A. artists' techniques research project at the Fogg Museum where he specialized in mosaics. He was also a member of the Boston 'Painter's Workshop' which lectured on painting techniques at the 1941 Kingston Conference.
- 16. The Atelier: A School of Drawing Painting Sculpture, n.d. [November 1931]. Prudence Heward, Mabel May, Lilias Newton, Sarah Robertson, and Annie Savage are also listed as members of the teaching staff; however it appears their names were added for social reasons. They didn't teach at the school. (Interview with Lilias T. Newton, Montreal, 11 September 1973.)
- 17. Interview with Allan Harrison, Montreal, 13 September 1973.
- "The Atelier" / A School of Modern Art, The Montrealer (October 1932).
- 19. Thomas Archer, 'Montreal Letter: The Art of Holgate,' *Saturday Night*, vol. XLVIII, no. 23 (15 April 1933), p. 7.
- 20. Interview with Allan Harrison, Montreal, 13 September 1973.
- People Who Do Things: André Biéler, Saturday Night, vol. L, no. 46 (21 September 1935), p. 16.
- 22. Frances K. Smith, op. cit.
- Interview with André Biéler, Glenburnie (Ontario), 18 December 1973.
- Roland Prévost, 'M. Gérard Morisset,' La Revue Populaire, vol. XXVIII, no. 4 (April 1935), p. 5.
- Patrick Morgan was a relative of Cleveland Morgan of the Art Association of Montreal, and of John Lyman.
- 26. The Douanier Rousseau Tradition In French Canada, 'The Art News, vol. xxxvi, no. 10 (4 December 1937), p. 13.
- 27. Guy Robert, *Jean Paul Lemieux la poétique de la souvenance* (Quebec: Éditions Garneau, 1968), p. 15.

- 28. Robert Choquette, La pension Leblanc (Montreal, New York: Louis Carrier & Cie., 1927); Régis Roy, Le manoir hanté (Montreal, New York: Louis Carrier & Cie., 1928); Cora B. Fortier, Le petit page de Frontenac (Montreal: Librairie d'Action canadienne française Ltée, 1930).
- 29. Guy Robert, op. cit., p. 15.
- 30. Guy Robert, op. cit., p. 18.
- 31. See *Soleil d'Après-midi* (1933, oil on canvas; 30 x 34 in., 76.2 x 86.4 cm) in the Musée du Québec; repr. in Guy Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- 32. Henri Girard, 'L'École du Meuble,' *La Revue Moderne*, vol. xxi, no. 4 (August 1939), p. 11.
- Gilles Corbeil, 'Jean Paul Lemieux, Peintre Intimiste,' Arts et Pensée, vol. 3, no. 14 (December 1953), p. 39.
- 34. Guy Robert, op. cit., p. 22.
- 35. Jean Paul Lemieux, 'La Peinture chez les Canadiens français,' *Le Jour*, vol. 1, no. 44 (16 July 1938).
- 36. Interview with Jori Smith, Montreal, 16 January 1974.
- 37. Idem
- 38. Conversation with Stanley Cosgrove, Montreal, 8 March 1974.
- Huntley Drummond was president of Redpath Sugar where Stanley Cosgrove's father worked. Stanley himself had worked there for several summers. (Conversation with Stanley Cosgrove, Montreal, 8 March 1974.)
- Germain Leber, 'Stanley Cosgrove / peinture audacieux,' La Revue Moderne, vol. xxvi, no. 3 (July 1944), p. 22. The murals for New York were painted on canvas in Montreal and later installed in the pavilion.
- 41. Anasthase David had been Minister of Education in the Quebec government and was instrumental in setting up the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal and Quebec. The David Scholarship, the only one in Canada at this time, was offered for study in France. The first person to receive this prize was Alfred Pellan in 1926.
- 42. Conversation with Stanley Cosgrove, Montreal, 8 March 1974.

80. MARC-AURÈLE FORTIN Landscape at Hochelaga c. 1931

81.ANDRÉ BIÉLER
Corpus Christi Procession, Sainte-Adèle 1936





***82.**ANDRÉ BIÉLER
Before the Auction 1936

83.ANDRÉ BIÉLER *Gatineau Madonna* 1940



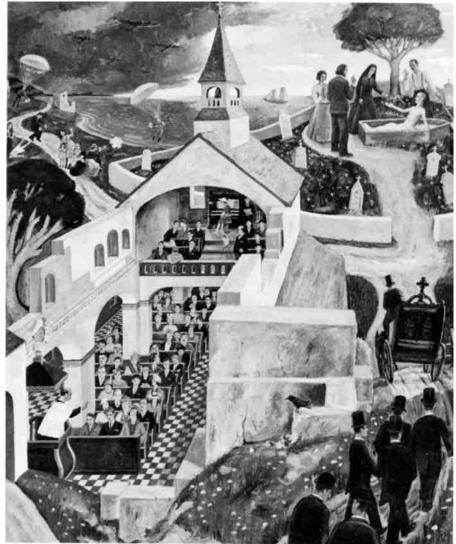


*84. JEAN PAUL LEMIEUX

Landscape in the Eastern Townships 1936

85.JEAN PAUL LEMIEUX *Lazarus* 1941





86. JORI SMITH *Mile Rose* 1936

*87. STANLEY COSGROVE Madeleine with Short Hair 1939



