

PAINTINGS THAT SAY CANADA



«COUNTER POINT WITH GRIBSON» Acrylic on canvas, 11 x 14 in.

Robert Genn has long been recognized as one of Canada's most accomplished painters. His work has been acclaimed both at home and abroad. Primarily an interpreter of the Canadian landscape, his work draws extensively from his considerable travels. The Genn style includes elements of the styles of previous generations of Canadian painters blended with Genn's own techniques, resulting in paintings which are uniquely Genn's. "I was always impressed with the

Group of Seven, the Nordics, even the traditional Russian painters, Genn says. "I liked the strength, the stroke, the design. I suppose a kind of order shows in my style. Things are somewhat organized and idealized.

"Then there is freshness. I need to make a work that looks fresh and involves the eye in bravura. It is, after all, paint. I've had a growing love affair with paint. Also, my style includes tendencies which I can hardly control — lineups, flats, gradations, spots."

Genn was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1936. His formal art training included the University of British Columbia, Victoria College, and the Art Center School in Los Angeles. Nonetheless, he doesn't believe "in teaching art" — "I think it's bad for the teacher and misleading to many students. The best teacher is the self. I believe in helping promising artists to an understanding of the "art spirit". If they have what it takes — truth, perseverance, some wee bit of talent — they will find within them-



«WALBURN BEACH ON THE WEST COAST TRAIL» Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 24 in.

elves what they are looking for."

In the opening paragraph of his book "In Praise of Painting", Genn describes the inspiration that led to his career in painting: "When I was three, I did a drawing of a duck. My parents thought it was wonderful. No one will ever know whether that duck was really good or my parents just believed it was, but I've considered myself an artist ever since. Drawing that duck taught me that the work of an artist was really a form of play — a belief that it is unshaken to this day." The duck drawing is still in the Genn collection.

Genn believes that we live in very fortunate times. "Our world is still largely unspoiled. Variety continues to exist. Specificity is a marvel and life is an unsolved riddle. In all this mystery there is a place for art. In Canadian painting, when you sort it out, standards are high, and getting higher.

Somehow, deep down, I feel that the really great paintings haven't been painted yet. There is lots yet to be done in Canada."

Genn obtains his material on extensive trips. He has recently backpacked both the Chilkooot and the arduous West Coast Trail in BC. Last year, he walked the Robert Louis Stevenson Trail in central France, a journey of over 100 miles, painting the same scenes that Stevenson had portrayed in 1878. On another journey requiring six separate trips, Genn retraced the steps of Henry Bartlett, an English adventurer and artist, who travelled from Halifax to Niagara Falls via the St-Lawrence River in 1859, painting and sketching en route. Genn's quest was to revisit the locations and recreate the scenes as they currently exist. In this odyssey, he was accompanied by historian Thomas Fleming of Vancouver, who prepared the itinerary

with the help of regional museums. Genn says of the endeavour: "Every once in a while, were able to find the exact rock, such as at the chutes at Sherbrooke. Rocks don't change much, they are immutable. For some reason, finding these rocks, especially the ones where Bartlett rested his paint box, gives a sense of the permanence of art and the bridging of history over the 156 years. It's one of those life enhancing moments."

Genn is a disciplined painter with patterns of research, travel, work and scheduling. He produces a great number of works each year. In Canada, his work is shown at the Bronte Harbour Fine Arts Gallery, Oakville, Ontario, Hollander York Gallery, Toronto, Galerie Mihalis, Hudson, Quebec; Assiniboia Gallery, Regina, Masters Gallery, Calgary, West End Gallery, Edmonton and Victoria, BC., Jenkins Showler Gallery, White Rock, BC.,

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Humberston Edwards, Vancouver, Hambleton Galleries, Kelowna, BC. Those who know Genn feel that he could have been a success in almost any field he might have chosen. Canadians are fortunate he chose to be a painter. "The great joy, he says, is to be a collector of earth's sights. To go into the wilderness and take without taking. But even more, to take in such a way as to put your own stamp on what is seen. To be able to render the given in a personal style, but it also says something of honouring our world with a modest tribute."

Genn then quotes Stevenson: "The world is so full of a number of things. I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings." //

Ken Alderdice



«SEENA QUIET» Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 34 in. Jenkins/Showler's Collection