

Weather Forecast: COLDER.

MONTEAL, TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 1913.

WILL SPEND FOUR MILLIONS ON A NORTH-END PARK

Will Be Situated on the Back River Near New Route of the C. N. Ry.

WORKING ON PLANS TO START VERY SOON

Stadium for Hockey is Included, Also a Race Course—Money is Raised for Venture.

Also a Hockey Stadium

It is the intention to build a stadium on the grounds which will be utilized for the purpose and an effort will be made to get the location ready to play on the proposed site. There will be located on the site a large stadium, a tennis court, a horse track, and a race course. The money for the venture is being raised by subscription and the plan will be to start work on it as soon as the money is available.

Foreign Investors

Mr. C. J. Leonard has just returned on business from Boston, where an effort is being made to secure foreign investors for the project. The money was obtained in England and France and now is being sent here to Montreal. The plan is to build the stadium on the site of the old back river race track.

DR. MOLLOY GIVES GOVERNMENT VERY STRONG ARGUMENT

Spoke at the Montreal Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Molloy gave a very strong argument in favor of the government's policy regarding the tramways. He stated that the government's plan was the only one that would be beneficial to the city in the long run.

THE WEATHER

Forecast.
Clear, with occasional light clouds, and a slight breeze from the west. Temperature 40 to 45. Windy and cold, with a light snowfall. Temperature 35 to 40.

THE WEATHER (Continued) - Clear, with occasional light clouds, and a slight breeze from the west. Temperature 40 to 45. Windy and cold, with a light snowfall. Temperature 35 to 40.

ART ASSOCIATION EXHIBITION SHOWS NOTABLE FEATURES

Canadian Artists Have at Last Realized Possibilities of Canadian Art School.

OIL PAINTINGS ARE SUPERIOR SECTION

Recognition of Painters Who Have Waited Long for Honors Here.

Winter Show Impressive

The Art Association exhibition is well attended and the oil painting section is particularly impressive. The artists who have waited long for recognition in Canada are finally being recognized.

Dr. Richer Believes Friedmann Treatment Good for Tuberculosis of Bones

Dr. Richer has expressed his confidence in the Friedmann treatment for tuberculosis of the bones. He believes it to be a very effective method.

What Was That Case?

The case of Miss Dubois, which is being discussed in the columns of this paper, has been a very interesting one. It has raised many questions regarding the treatment of tuberculosis of the bones.

Some Lacking Features

Some of the features of the exhibition are lacking. The oil painting section is particularly impressive, but there are some areas that need more attention.

FIRST PHOTOS OF CAPT. SCOTT IN THE ANTARCTIC



CAN UNDERSTAND IMPROVEMENT IN MISS DUBOIS CASE

Dr. Richer Believes Friedmann Treatment Good for Tuberculosis of Bones.

The case of Miss Dubois, which is being discussed in the columns of this paper, has been a very interesting one. It has raised many questions regarding the treatment of tuberculosis of the bones.

FRIEDMANN CASE ENDS FATALY, BUT SERUM NOT BLAMED

Special to The Montreal Star. New York, March 25. - Reports of the Montreal Chamber of Commerce regarding the Friedmann case have been very interesting.

IS NO SPLIT LOCALLY AMONG SUFFRAGETTES

There is no split locally among the suffragettes. They are all working together for the cause.

THE TRAMWAYS QUESTION

Palming with the street-car situation will do no good. Neither will compressing or anything else. The experience of other American cities shows that the pattern of Tramways Company has failed—

It is the intention to build a stadium on the grounds which will be utilized for the purpose and an effort will be made to get the location ready to play on the proposed site.

What the result will be known by later experience. It has found its expression in terms of over-crowded cars and congested car-lines.

Now are the suggestions which will do it in money and in total incorporation those which should command themselves, most highly. We are in an exceptional situation as regards our tramway service.

Remedying is a means of relieving relief, but in the present stage of Montreal development, it is no means a final goal.

Relief will be welcome, but we must not be too appreciative of it and not grateful for it.

FIRST BODY IS TAKEN FROM CANAL THIS YEAR WATER IN HARBOR IS NINE INCHES HIGHER

The body of the first person who was drowned in the canal this year has been recovered. The water in the harbor is nine inches higher than last year.

The 1913 Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal: Anatomy of a Public Debate

LORNE HUSTON

The 1913 edition of the Spring Exhibition at the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) provoked a flood of commentary in the newspapers, both by critics and by readers, on a scale never seen before in Canada (See Appendix 1).¹ The show, which opened on 26 March and lasted until 19 April, presented nearly 500 works by 182 artists and was the first to be held in the luxurious new premises on Sherbrooke Street West.² It was the thirtieth to have been sponsored by the AAM since it opened its first galleries on Philips Square in 1879.³ Provocative headlines and occasional front page coverage led the readers into long articles and numerous photographs of the works on the inner pages of the papers. Readers responded with passion, challenging and defending the critics' judgements. The latter, in turn, angrily replied to their detractors. Over twenty letters to the editors were published in seven of the dailies (three French- and four English-language publications) that sold in Montreal at that time. All observers agreed that attendance broke new records; by the most conservative estimates, over 15,000 people visited the show during the twenty-two days that the galleries were open.⁴

Contemporary observers were very conscious of the extraordinary nature of the event. A review which appeared in the *Montreal Daily Witness* just after closing states: "The spring exhibition at the Art Gallery, which closed on Saturday night, proved, as was anticipated, by far the most successful ever held under the auspices of the Art Association of Montreal."⁵ In his year-end summary of the visual art scene in Montreal, the critic of *The Montreal Star*, Samuel Morgan-Powell (1867–1962), claimed that, "The thirtieth Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal will be remembered as marking a distinct departure from the old routine, the old styles, the old traditions."⁶

For the most part, this critic was wrong. The 1913 Spring Exhibition (SE1913) has not been remembered as marking a distinct departure. In general surveys of Canadian art history, when the show is mentioned at all, it is

1 | *The Montreal Daily Star*, 25 March 1913, p. 1. *The Star* gives front page coverage to the Spring Exhibition following opening night but makes no mention of the controversial paintings until the issue is raised by the smaller newspapers. (Photo: author)

not seen as a turning point but rather as proof of the generally conservative attitudes that prevailed in Montreal (and in Canada as a whole) at the turn of the century.⁷ More specific thematic studies, such as Joan Murray's work on Post-Impressionism in Canada, elaborate this perception of the situation: "In Montreal, the Spring Show was reviewed with angry ferocity." She goes on to provide a series of snippets of inflammatory prose by the critics and an excerpt from the "feisty response" of one of the most criticized painters, John G. Lyman (1886–1967).⁸ Ross King adopts a similar approach in his recent essay on the "modernist revolution" in Canada. In his view, the press reaction to the Montreal show confirms that Montreal (and Canada in general before the advent of the Group of Seven) was "conservative and unadventurous in its tastes."⁹ An interesting exception to this general view is provided by Jean-René Ostiguy in his essay in the catalogue for the exhibition *Modernism in Quebec Art 1916–1946* held in 1982 at the National Gallery in Ottawa. He mentions the SE1913 only in passing, though not as proof of conservative taste in Quebec, but as foreshadowing the modernist decades to come.¹⁰

To date, the most detailed study of this exhibition is found in the catalogue for a major retrospective exhibition on the career of John Lyman held in 1986. Louise Dompierre examines the critical reception of the exhibition, listing thirty-five articles and letters which appeared in the press at the time. While noting that Lyman was "one of the central figures of the debates," she explains the critical reaction as follows: "To understand the critics' attitude it is important to note that, at that time, many Montrealers, critics included, still cherished inoffensive allegorical subjects, well observed and accurately rendered landscapes and the 'sane impressionism' of such Canadian artists as Maurice Cullen."¹¹

I will argue here that, in order to properly understand the critics' reactions, the concept that the art world in Montreal was entrenched in tradition needs to be examined more closely. Controversy is a paradoxical phenomenon. If the art world in Montreal was so conservative, why did the critics pay so much attention to these young artists? Why would critics choose to make John Lyman a central figure of debate? He was just twenty-six years old and had only begun his career. Surely a truly conservative milieu would not even generate a controversy. The jury could have rejected these paintings or stuck them in a dark corner somewhere. The newspapers too, could have simply ignored these works, as they did so many others which they judged incompetent. The relative neglect into which the massive outburst of public opinion in 1913 has fallen indicates the degree to which the event has not been integrated into a "founding myth" of artistic modernism in Canada. Yet the attention it generated in its own time belies the view of a world entrenched in tradition.

The Spring Exhibition of 1913 provides a particularly fruitful way of investigating the dynamics at work in the Montreal art world. Over the years, the Spring Exhibitions had become a highlight of the art scene and as such, elicited various reactions from artists, critics and the public. The first part of this article looks at the Spring Exhibition as an institution and gives a broad overview of its evolution as part of the Montreal art world since its inception in 1880.

A second part of the analysis looks at the Spring Exhibition of 1913 as a specific event. The emphasis is on the dynamics at work for that particular exhibition. I will examine the scope and the nature of the polemical comments in the newspapers. What place did they occupy within the overall newspaper coverage? How did the character of the coverage compare to previous years? As we shall see, the 1913 exhibition did include some unusual features and these are examined in more detail.

The final section suggests a few ways in which the preceding analysis can contribute to our understanding of the dynamics at work in the Montreal art world in 1913. Two aspects of the context are examined in particular: the relationship between the art critic and the public, as manifested in the numerous letters written to the editor about opinions expressed in the newspapers, and the extent to which the public debate was related to the issues of modernism and tradition.

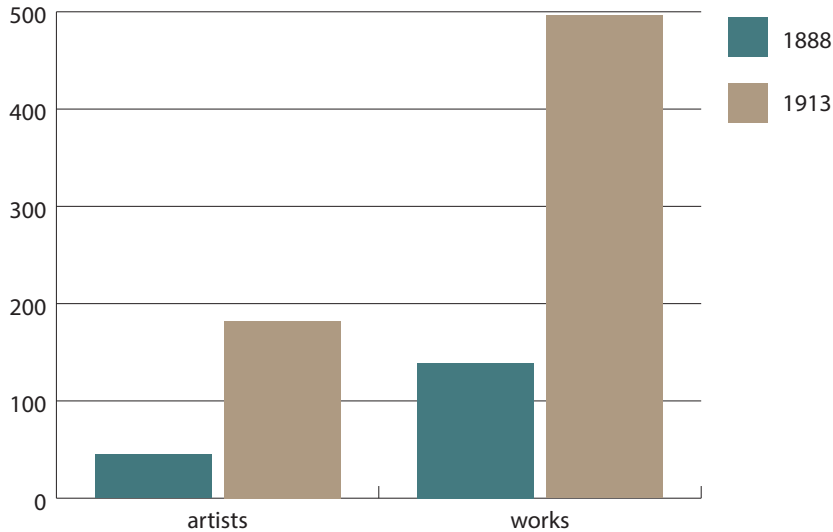
PART 1: THE SPRING EXHIBITION AS AN INSTITUTION

The Spring Exhibition could hardly be considered a traditional institution in Montreal in 1913. A generation earlier artists had no such annual occasion to show their works to the public. In 1879, the AAM had built the first hall in Canada specifically designed for housing art exhibitions and shortly afterwards it announced its intention to hold annual exhibitions mainly devoted to contemporary Canadian art. The first such exhibition opened its doors on 12 April 1880 just a few weeks after the inaugural exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy (RCA) held in Ottawa. By 1913, the Spring Exhibition had succeeded in becoming the highlight of the art season in Montreal.¹²

A comparison between the 1913 Spring Exhibition and a relatively typical year in the 1880s provides some feeling for the changes that have occurred. The scale of the show had more than tripled (see Table 1).

By 1913, an increasing number of women and French-Canadian artists were sharing the exhibition space with the men of British origin who had monopolized the shows at the outset. No French-Canadians participated in

Table 1 | Number of artists and works shown at Spring Exhibitions AAM



Source: Catalogues of the Spring Exhibition at the Art Association of Montreal in 1888 and 1913

the Spring Exhibition in 1888. Women artists accounted for a little over a quarter (27%) of the artists that year whereas they represented 32% in 1913. The types of works shown were also increasingly diverse. While the early shows were composed almost exclusively of oil paintings and water colours, by 1913, pastels, drawings, sculpture, architectural plans, and ceramics were included in the exhibition.¹³ By all accounts, the works on view comprised a fairly representative cross-section of the diversity of contemporary art in Canada at that time. A wide variety of works were shown by artists of all ages from established artists of the time such as Homer Ransford Watson (1855–1936) and Robert Harris (1849–1919) who had developed their painting styles in the 1880s, all the way down to the young promising painters in their twenties, many of whom, such as Emily Coonan (1885–1971) and Randolph Hewton (1888–1960), had studied at the school of the Art Association. In addition to these professional or aspiring professional artists, a number of amateur artists, often members of the AAM or from families that were benefactors, showed their works at these art shows. As one reviewer of the 1910 Spring Exhibition put it: “A picture finds its level there as the individual finds his place in the society of his fellowmen.”¹⁴

Clearly then, on an institutional level at least, there is nothing to indicate that the art world in Montreal was a bastion of tradition. Over this same

period (1880–1913) which saw the growth of the Spring Exhibitions, the AAM had founded an art library and an art school for training artists and had presided over two major expansions of its installations. In fact, this period (1880–1913) corresponds to one of the most dynamic eras in the economic history of Montreal and to a period of rapid growth of cultural institutions.¹⁵

The Niche of the Spring Exhibition in Relation to Other Major Art Exhibitions at the AAM

Further, it should be noted that the spring shows, unlike other exhibitions held regularly in the galleries of the Art Association, were oriented toward the idea of showing how the art world was evolving. They were not like the Loan Exhibitions, which were held from time to time to allow the public to discover some of the prestigious works held in private collections of the city. The paintings shown there were usually from earlier periods and of European origin. Nor were they like those of the Royal Canadian Academy, held in Montreal every two or three years. The RCA shows were composed solely of works sent by full and associate members of the institution whereas the spring show was, by its very nature, more diverse and contemporary. In 1913, the Spring Exhibition attracted twice as many visitors as the RCA exhibition, held in Montreal a little later in the year.¹⁶ One contemporary observer compared the RCA exhibition to the Spring Exhibition of the AAM in the following terms:

In one way it is more important to know where we stand in art as a people than to know that we have individuals who excel as painters, and one Spring Exhibition teaches us more about the former than half a dozen Academy Exhibitions can. The latter are, largely and rightly the more or less happy hunting grounds of the professional and the amateur expert, while the Spring Exhibition fulfills its mission best when it displays a fair average of the country's serious aspirants.¹⁷

It is not surprising then that the more tolerant, pluralist attitude shown by the jury of the Spring Exhibition would come under fire by some critics. *The Montreal Herald* led the charge in this respect. In 1912, it opened its coverage of the Spring Exhibition with a provocative headline: “Art Show Looks As If the Hanging Committee Slept.” The critic went on:

The hanging committee has completely abdicated all its functions as a director of public taste, as a critic of the work of young artists and experimental schools, as Montreal's chief artistic authority.¹⁸

The critic of the *Montreal Daily Witness*, on the other hand, defended the hanging committee and noted how many works of art had actually been refused by the jury. This critic seems to have benefited from inside information on the way the committee worked since no public accounting of the jury's deliberations was available.

Nearly three hundred pictures failed to find their way into this year's exhibition [377 were admitted], and some others were entered with hesitancy where, in spite of defects, decided ability was shown. It is the policy of the association to be much severer upon the work of those who intend to make a living by their art both as a protection to the public, and to discourage them as early as possible from a calling in which they could never meet success. If no improvement is shown in the work of artists whose canvasses are given admittance one year on trial after one or two seasons it is no longer admitted.¹⁹

The critic of *The Montreal Star* too, defended the policy of the hanging committee in the name of encouraging public debate:

Everyone should visit the Spring Exhibition now on at the Art Gallery and decide for himself whether it is or is not a good exhibition. Some critics have been blamed for praising, others praised for blaming. The chief thing to remember about this much discussed Spring Exhibition is that it is an exhibition which aims to give everyone a chance to show his or her work and to obtain from the public an opinion on the same work.²⁰

Because its mandate was to highlight what was new, it is clear that the Spring Exhibition of the Art Association was not dedicated to celebrating traditional art forms. It was an exhibition of contemporary art and the jury was sensitive to the fact that there would be little interest in an annual exhibition if it showed essentially the same thing from year to year. One of the members of the hanging committee in 1913 said just this in response to a challenge by a reporter from *The Montreal Herald*:

It seems to me that they [those who criticize the hanging committee for a lax attitude on admission of art work] take a wrong point of view with regard to pictures at an annual exhibition. You'd think that everything would have to be a masterpiece to get in. There wouldn't be many in there in that case, and I think they'd bore people to death

into the bargain. I don't know what they expect of us as a hanging committee. It's not only what one likes oneself that matters.²¹

Evolution of Newspaper Coverage of the Spring Exhibition

The storm of articles and letters which appeared in 1913 presupposes the existence of a newspaper market which reaches out to a mass circulation audience. In contrast, when Impressionism was introduced to the Canadian public in the 1880s, it was much more difficult to obtain an idea of the paintings under discussion. Public exhibitions of art were sporadic, photo reproductions were not published in the newspapers, the number of Canadian students studying abroad was much smaller, and the big private art collections in Montreal had not yet been built up.²²

The growth in the newspaper coverage of the Spring Exhibition parallels the increase in the number of works and artists involved. The anonymous critics of the 1880s barely devoted a few hundred words to the show in the inner pages of the newspapers and their comments were meant to encourage art patrons to attend the exhibition rather than to comment on specific works: "It is to be hoped that none will miss seeing this really estimable collection of paintings" concludes the review appearing in *The Gazette* during the Spring Exhibition of 1883.²³ By contrast, at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, newspaper coverage was prominently placed and often involved a preliminary article about opening night and then one or two more articles in the following days.

In this general sense then, one can see that the debates that ensued in 1913 took place in a modern framework, but this says little about the specific nature of the discussions. To what extent were they exceptional?

PART 2: THE SPRING EXHIBITION OF 1913 AS AN EVENT

The writer in the *Witness* began his article by describing the gasps of astonishment, indignation and derisive comment caused by the Post-Impressionists at the opening of the exhibition. "Immensity of canvas, screamingly discordant colors and execrable drawing are the methods they have employed to jar the public eye," he wrote.²⁴

In *The Montreal Daily Star*, Samuel Morgan-Powell attacks his [Lyman's] canvases as examples of the dreaded Post-Impressionism, haughtily dismissed as "A fad, an inartistic fetish for the amusement

of bad draughtsmanship, incompetent colourists and others who find themselves unqualified to paint pictures.”²⁵

These two excerpts are typical of how present-day art historians Murray and King focus on the purported sense of outrage of the Montreal public in 1913. This section attempts to outline the context within which the original polemical comments occurred and to question the way they are interpreted today. The first question one might ask is to what extent were comments such as these typical of the press coverage? Were similar comments present in all the newspapers? What importance was given them in the newspaper as a whole? Even within a given article, to what extent did they set the tone for the entire review? And how typical were comments such as these compared to years gone by? This first set of questions seeks to establish the boundaries which delimited the polemical comments noted above.

Once the shape of the polemical commentary is defined, once we know more about where it begins and stops, it becomes possible to suggest factors that are behind it. This is the focus of the second part of this section.

The Shape of the Newspaper Coverage of the Spring Exhibition of 1913

1. It was extensive

The first thing to recognize is that the newspaper coverage was huge. The Montreal newspapers, both French and English, were analyzed from the period of 17 March (nine days before opening night), until 2 June 1913 (six weeks after closing).²⁶ Taken as a whole, this press coverage is far greater than any other exhibition previously held at the Art Association. This type of systematic analysis of press coverage of art exhibitions is rare in art history, so it is difficult to make comparisons. A rough estimate can be gathered from the scrapbooks which were compiled by the Art Association on the press coverage of their shows.²⁷ These records do not necessarily include all the press reaction to any given exhibition. They are notably weak, at least for the early history of the Art Association, on articles published in the French-language press. Nevertheless, they do give a general idea of the amount of reaction, which can be compared from year to year. There were twice as many press clippings included in the AAM scrapbooks for SE1913 as compared to SE1912 (15 densely packed pages as compared to 7.5) and four or five times that of earlier years (1906, 1907, 1908). The 1911 Spring Exhibition (11 pages) and the 1909 Exhibition of Modern French Art held at the Art Association (7 pages) were the next biggest years.

Only two Montreal dailies, *Le Canada*, closely aligned with the Liberal party of Wilfrid Laurier at the time, and the Yiddish-language *Keneder*

Table 2 | Newspaper coverage of the 1913 Spring Exhibition

Newspapers	# articles	# words	circulation ²⁸
<i>La Patrie</i>	1	450	48,237
<i>La Presse</i>	2	2,400	114,365
<i>Le Devoir</i>	1	1,600	20,000
<i>Le Pays</i> (weekly)	2	1,050	n/a
<i>The Gazette</i>	5	5,600	20,754
<i>The Montreal Herald</i>	5	3,450	26,033
<i>The Mirror</i> (weekly)	1	2,200	n/a
<i>The Montreal Star</i>	26	19,000	83,352
<i>Montreal Daily Witness</i>	9	6,250	29,178
TOTAL	52	42,000	

Adler,²⁹ made no mention of the 1913 exhibition, but all other dailies, Liberal, Conservative, and independent, in French and in English, covered the show. The coverage in the weeklies was much less widespread. Articles were found only in *The Mirror*, a fashionable English-language publication, and *Le Pays*, a left-wing French-language newspaper.

2. It was in English

A summary reading of Table 2 shows the huge discrepancy (8:1) in the coverage by English- and French-language newspapers. Put simply, the 1913 Spring Exhibition at the Art Association provoked little controversy in the French-language press. The coverage in the mass-circulation dailies (*La Presse* and *La Patrie*) was remarkably similar to previous years. The authors of these articles did not see the show as controversial and did not join in the discussion launched in the English-language press. It was a non-issue. This is not to say that they didn't comment on the same paintings. *La Presse*, in particular, gave a generally favourable review of the show and lauded some of the very artists that were denounced in the English-language press. The French-language press, however, did not see these works as a radical break with the past and, on the contrary, they emphasised the continuity with past work. Writing in *La Presse*, Albert Laberge³⁰ focused his attention on the work of the "colourists," commending "Suzor-Coté, Maurice Cullen, A.Y. Jackson et Randolph Hewton" as true artists who are taking up the struggle launched by Manet and his followers forty years earlier in Paris: "Ils triompheront un jour, mais à l'heure actuelle, ils reçoivent à part un ou deux, qu'un maigre

encouragement et leur seule satisfaction est d'être fidèles à leurs convictions et de peindre suivant leur idéal."³¹

La Patrie, for its part, gave a routine review of the Spring Exhibition, emphasizing the diversity of styles on view. The reviewer repeated mantras of previous years when he mentioned a general improvement in the level of painting.

If any controversy is evident in the French-language press it appears in Godfroy Langlois's small left-wing weekly, *Le Pays*. On the very last day of the spring show, *Le Pays* published a letter from a reader denouncing the review written by Léon Lorrain in Bourassa's newspaper, *Le Devoir*. In particular, this reader criticized the excessive praise showered upon Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté's (1869–1937) sculpture of *Le Vieux Pionnier Canadien*. Where Lorrain sees an example of healthy nationalism, the writer in *Le Pays* sees evidence of the critic's crass mercantilism in promoting the career of Suzor-Coté.³²

As we shall see, this difference in the newspaper coverage between the French and English-language press provides a clue to understanding the nature of the controversy.

3. *It was taken over by The Montreal Star*

The Montreal Star provided by far the most coverage, almost as much as all the other newspapers combined. This is largely due to the fact that it became the principal forum for debate. *The Montreal Star* usually supported the Conservative Party in Federal elections but it was first and foremost a mass-circulation daily, with the largest readership in English Canada. It was the only newspaper that could afford to hire a journalist, Samuel Morgan-Powell, who specialized in the arts.³³

It is interesting to note, however, that the polemical nature of the newspaper coverage began with the smaller newspapers which were generally associated with the Liberal Party: *Montreal Daily Witness* and *The Montreal Herald*. The *Witness* was a self-appointed mouthpiece for Protestant opinion. It supported struggles for social reform: for temperance, for social hygiene, and against what it perceived as the generally reactionary tendencies of the Catholic Church, both French-Canadian and Irish. *The Montreal Herald* was more of a muckraker newspaper at this point; it would print almost any copy that would sell newspapers, especially local news, crime stories, and natural disasters all over the world.³⁴ These papers began their coverage by focusing on the gasps of astonishment purported to have been emitted by viewers on opening night. They were the ones that printed screaming headlines such as "Post-Impressionists Shock Local Art Lovers at the Spring Art Exhibition" (*Montreal Daily Witness*) and "Futurist Pictures Cause Stir at Spring Art

Exhibit. Does Committee Endorse ‘Infanticist School’ Patrons Want to Know” (*The Montreal Herald*). *The Montreal Star* and *The Gazette*, which had both supported Borden’s Conservatives against Laurier’s Liberals in the 1911 federal elections, made no mention of such outraged reactions on opening night and gave relatively standard reviews of the show to begin with. The Conservative newspapers also devoted a special article to the Spring Exhibition as a social event, giving long lists of the names of the local celebrities who made an appearance at the opening night of the exhibition while the Liberal-leaning *Witness* and *Herald* did not concern themselves with such formalities. The outrageous character of the SE1913 was not mentioned in *The Montreal Star* until the weekend edition following opening night (Fig. 1). From then on, however, the mass-circulation newspaper would keep stoking the fires of debate for the next two months.

4. It was central

As can be gathered from the previous comments, the controversy was central to the coverage in the English-language newspapers. It is striking to note how the very same opinions on the very same paintings were treated in completely different ways in the French- and English-language newspapers. Like Morgan-Powell in *The Montreal Star*, Lorrain writing in *Le Devoir* was highly critical of Lyman and Hewton but this criticism was not a central feature in his coverage of the exhibition. Lorrain’s comments were tucked away in a short paragraph towards the end of his review and did not define his overall perception of the show.³⁵ Morgan-Powell, on the other hand, became involved in a very personal and heated exchange of letters with Lyman. In general, the English-language newspapers put the controversy at the very heart of their coverage of the exhibition. Only *The Gazette* maintained an even keel. It recognized the controversy but declined to participate actively. *The Montreal Herald* and the *Montreal Daily Witness* devoted almost half of their coverage of the opening of the show to the young artists whose works were creating such a sensation. The writer in the *Montreal Daily Witness* wrote, “These ‘Sans-Culottes’ have actually managed to dominate the whole exhibition.”³⁶ The letters to the editor which appeared in *The Montreal Star* in sympathy or in reaction to the numerous articles written by Morgan-Powell were overwhelmingly concerned with the controversial paintings, usually referred to as Post-Impressionist but also Futurist, Cubist, Infanticist, amongst other epithets.

5. It was unique

Comments such as these are what the 1913 Spring Exhibition is remembered for today. Yet there is something rather curious about the violence of these

remarks. They were not at all typical of reviews of the spring show published in previous years which tended to be very indulgent and benign. The contrast is all the more surprising in light of the fact that A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Hewton, and Lyman, the three most criticized artists in 1913, had been sending works to the Spring Exhibition for two or three years. The first two painters had elicited a few minor, but encouraging, remarks in passing.³⁷ The remarks on Lyman's paintings were more cautious but the critic in *The Montreal Star* deemed them worthy of notice, and suggested they should be well studied before they were too hastily condemned.³⁸ In 1912, there was only one mention of Post-Impressionism and that was in a special contribution to *The Gazette*, written by the art dealer, William R. Watson (1887–1971).³⁹ What had happened during the interval?

Exploring the Boundaries of the Newspaper Coverage

The preceding analysis of the newspaper coverage would thus seem to contradict the generally held notion that the violent criticism directed towards the young artists was a knee-jerk reaction on the part of a conservative public to radically new paintings. How can we explain the drastic change in tone between 1912 and 1913? There may have been incremental changes in the style of painting of the artists over the year but there had been no major break. In 1913, Morgan-Powell admitted that it was between 1909 and 1911 that Lyman's style of painting underwent a radical change.⁴⁰ So why did similar paintings not elicit similar reactions?

How could the violent criticism be a simple response to radically new paintings if no such response was forthcoming in the French-language newspapers? It would be difficult to argue that the French-Canadian public was more accustomed to modern trends in painting, and thus less infuriated by them. In fact, as we shall see, the explanation of the polemical nature of the English-Canadian reaction was more for the opposite reason. It was not because the critics were unaware of international trends in contemporary art that they were hostile; it was rather their perception of these trends that shaped their attitudes. What the most vociferous members of the English community were reacting to was not so much the paintings in front of their eyes in Montreal but the debates on Post-Impressionism in London and New York.

The Issue of Post-Impressionism

The term 'Post-Impressionism' was new in 1913. It came into prominence when the British critic, Roger Fry, used it as a title for an art exhibition

he organized at the Grafton Galleries in London in November 1910. The reaction of the British press to this first exhibition of Post-Impressionism was enormous and much more polemical than it had been when they were first confronted with Impressionism.⁴¹ In many ways, public reaction to Post-Impressionism in England can be seen as a prefiguring the reception in Montreal two and a half years later. All the daily London newspapers and many of the more specialized periodicals carried articles, photographs, and letters to the editor about the exhibition. After an initial period of almost unmitigated hostility, the articles in support of the paintings shown became more frequent.

If the Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London constituted the initial reference point that influenced reactions to the phenomenon in Montreal, the more immediate influence was most certainly the famous Armory Show which had closed in New York City just ten days before the opening of the Montreal Spring Exhibition. The London exhibitions had also had an effect on the New York show. Two of the instigators of the Armory Show, Walter Kuhn and Arthur B. Davies, had in fact attended the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition held in London in 1912 and many of the artists represented there were also part of the New York show.⁴²

Heralded as a turning point in the critical reception of modern art in the United States, the Armory Show presented, for the first time in North America, the most current works by the European avant-gardes. It included over four hundred paintings by artists such as Matisse and Picasso, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, as well as the spiritual fathers of Post-Impressionism: Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin. The exhibition comprised about 1,300 works of art, two-thirds of which were by American artists. In terms of public interest, the show was a resounding success. Over 70,000 people visited the exhibition and the press coverage was immense. In New York, as in London, there was a real controversy. The violent criticism and mocking reviews of some critics were met with passionate and lengthy defences of the new schools of art in other quarters. At the time of the Montreal Spring exhibition, a reduced edition of the Armory Show, comprised mainly of the European paintings, was on its way to Chicago and would later be shown in Boston.⁴³

That critics and the public in Montreal were interested in the Armory Show is in no doubt. As the Spring Exhibition in Montreal and the Chicago version of the Armory Show were winding down, at least two articles appeared in the Montreal papers indicating that there had been an attempt to bring a version of the Armory Show to Montreal. The idea fell through however, according to *The Gazette*, because Montreal had no venue capable of showing the 1,300 works involved.⁴⁴ *The Montreal Star* published a lengthy

article on Picasso's paintings at the Armory Show; it was written by Marius de Zayas, a close collaborator of Alfred Stieglitz at the time.⁴⁵ John Lyman also made reference to the Armory Show when he accused his tormentor, Morgan-Powell in *The Montreal Star*, of "nourishing his pen with the sensational inaccuracies that appeared in the New York yellow press."⁴⁶ Morgan-Powell acknowledged that he had read a major article on Post-Impressionism published by Royal Cortissoz, the dean of art criticism in New York.⁴⁷ This was hardly published in the yellow press however, but in the April issue of *The Century Magazine*, a serious literary monthly.

Thus it appears that opinion in Montreal was being developed in relation to the debates on Post-Impressionism in London and New York. However, it is important to realize that our understanding of the term 'Post-Impressionism' is not identical with the way it was understood a century ago when the concept was being forged. Today we tend to see it simply as a convenient label to designate modern trends in French painting which occurred after the death of Manet (1883) and before the development of Cubism (1910). Murray describes it as an attempt to "create a more expressive and individual kind of art, partly through bolder, abstracted forms, partly through decorative elements of line and composition, partly through the use of bright, sometimes arbitrary colour."⁴⁸ This description emphasizes the formal concerns of Post-Impressionism but it leaves out a very important element which, as we shall see, dominated the discussion of the movement in Montreal in 1913. For most observers of the day, and indeed for the critic who coined the term, Post-Impressionism was a form of primitivism.

In an article published in the British periodical, *The Nation*, shortly after the London show opened, Fry explained his view of Post-Impressionism.

[It is a] revolt against the photographic vision of the nineteenth century, and even against the tempered realism of the last four hundred years ... At once the question is likely to arise: Why should the artist wantonly throw away all the science with which the Renaissance and the succeeding centuries have endowed mankind? Why would he wilfully return to primitive, or, as it is derisively called, barbaric art? The answer is that it is neither wilful nor wanton but simply necessary, if art is to be rescued from the hopeless encumbrance of its own accumulations of science; if art is to regain its power to express emotional ideas, and not to become an appeal to curiosity and wonder at the artist's perilous skill.⁴⁹

The formal concerns (bolder abstracted forms, decorative elements of line, and colour), which are paramount to our understanding of Post-

Impressionism today, were not the primary focus of this doctrine in 1913. To the extent that these considerations were mentioned, they were considered as the *means* by which emotional ideas could be expressed.

So what did the term mean to observers in Montreal in 1913? It would seem that the polemical charge that exploded in Montreal with the introduction of the term ‘Post-Impressionism’ was substantially related to its anti-intellectual, “anti-civilizational” message. Here too, much as in Britain and the United States, when Post-Impressionism was not considered simply a hoax, it was perceived as a form of primitivism. This is certainly the interpretation given to the movement by the art dealer William Watson, writing in *The Gazette* in 1912. He claimed that he had studied the movement and had visited galleries in Paris which showed the works of Gauguin and Cézanne. However, he suggests that the goal of these artists is not progress but rather “to go back to the art of very early peoples, to bring back their simplicity and innocence of vision; but with it comes cold crudity and a technique of retrogression.”⁵⁰

This vision of Post-Impressionism as a form of primitivism was also expressed by painter Maurice Cullen (1866–1934) when the journalist from *The Montreal Herald* asked him to share his views on the doctrine. The Post-Impressionist, says Cullen, is “a man who tries to get before impressions and to paint things as a child would.”⁵¹

These observers assuredly recognized Post-Impressionism as something new, but the call for primitivism in art was not generally recognized as progress in much the same way as observers of all periods of history, including today’s progressive observers of contemporary society, do not see all emerging trends as positive, or even modern.

This context can help us understand the reactions to Post-Impressionism at the SE1913. The paintings of Lyman, Jackson, and Hewton were viewed against the backdrop of an international polemic on Post-Impressionism in London and New York, and the Montreal critics were eager to weigh in for this fight. Or more precisely, the English-language critics felt called upon to give their opinions. For them, it could be argued, the struggle against the primitivism of Post-Impressionism was analogous to the defence of the British Empire waged by the Canadian imperialists of the day.⁵² It was a struggle for civilization and progress against tribalism in which Canada had a vital role to play.

The debate on Post-Impressionism as a form of primitivism had little resonance with French-Canadian opinion. The debate had not been framed in these terms within the French-language press of the time. Post-Impressionism as a label for current trends in art belonged exclusively to the international English-speaking art world. Apollinaire, for example, the famous poet and

frequent writer on modern art currents in Paris, did not use the term. Even in an article written a few months after the first London exhibition on exactly the same artists and from a very similar perspective as that adopted by Fry, Apollinaire made no reference to Post-Impressionism.⁵³ Apollinaire spoke of the disciples of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin, or extolled the merits of the Fauves, but he did not group them together under the heading of Post-Impressionism. In the English-language press however, Post-Impressionism had become a highly-charged polemical issue which served to galvanize critical opinion against some of the new trends in art.

PART 3: ISSUES IN DEBATE AT THE 1913 SPRING EXHIBITION

What can we learn from this study of the SE1913? In this final section, I attempt to identify some of the dynamics at work in the Montreal art world that have been obscured by the exclusive focus on the sensational nature of some of the art criticism. The first dynamic studied here concerns the relationship between the art critic and the public. The Spring Exhibition initiated a very lively debate concerning the role of the critic and this has not received the attention it deserves. The second aspect tackles the question of the opposition between modernism and tradition. To what extent does this study of SE1913 confirm or modify our perception of the nature of the art world in Montreal at that time?

The Role of the Critic

Studies of early art criticism in Canada tend to focus on the points of view expressed by critics and the role they played in influencing, or at least reflecting, public opinion.⁵⁴ This is the principal reason that articles on young audacious artists at the turn of the century (Lyman, Jackson) cite in detail the violent abuse that these artists endured at the hands of the critics. This approach tends to obscure the fact that such criticism is, in itself, modern and this recent characteristic of the art world did not exist even a single generation earlier.

What is most interesting about the newspaper coverage of the SE1913 is not so much its conservative or traditional point of view but the awkward and ill-defined way in which it was expressed and the readers' challenges to this new public voice. The newspapers of the period are full of fascinating letters that attempt to critically assess the points of view expressed in the ongoing controversy surrounding the SE1913. Over twenty letters were written to the newspapers of the day. When trying to make sense of this correspondence,

a word of caution may be useful. There were no formally recognized art critics writing for daily newspapers in Montreal in 1913. The editor assigned generalist reporters to cover the art shows or printed articles written by special contributors who often had more detailed knowledge of the art world than the regular journalists.

Not a lot is known about the men who wrote on art issues for the daily newspapers. Nothing is known about the journalists who covered the SE1913 in *The Gazette*, *The Montreal Herald*, or the *Montreal Daily Witness*. The most prolific writer of the day was undoubtedly Samuel Morgan-Powell.⁵⁵ He only started signing his articles in 1913 but he had apparently been working at various Montreal newspapers since 1905. At 45 years of age, Morgan-Powell was no longer a mere cub reporter but in fact his career at *The Montreal Star* would last another forty years. His position was unique in Montreal. He basically took control of the cultural pages of the main English-language newspaper, writing tirelessly and at great length, not only on the visual arts but also on literature, music, and especially theatre.

It is possible to identify some of the special contributors. *The Gazette* carried an article by William R. Watson, an up-and-coming young art dealer at the time.⁵⁶ One of the most articulate contributors to *The Montreal Star*, who took violent issue with Morgan-Powell, was Harold Mortimer-Lamb (1872–1970), an avid member of the Pictorialist movement in photography and an active member of the Art Association.⁵⁷ Some of these special contributions were no doubt solicited by the newspaper; others were volunteered. In almost all cases, however, the special contributors, whether they were art dealers or collectors, aspiring writers or painters, had specific interests they wished to defend in addition to their role as art critic.

The exact definition of an art critic and what authority this voice carried was thus relatively nebulous at the time. The same can be said about the reader. Quite clearly, some of the letters to the editor were written by very knowledgeable people who backed up their points of view with specific examples of paintings seen at exhibitions in London, New York, and Paris, as well as by references to international art historians of the day.⁵⁸ Some of the painters or members of their families sent letters to the editor.⁵⁹ A reader who signed his letter “H.R.W.” claims to have inside knowledge on the deliberations of the “Art Club.” This reader was most likely Homer Ransford Watson who was a founding member of the Canadian Art Club in Toronto and first president from 1907 until 1911.⁶⁰ Another reader signs his/her letter “ARCA” (Associate member of the Royal Canadian Academy). As citizens, these contributors had an inherent right to speak their mind but they were obviously trying to support their point of view by citing a legitimate authority. The fuzzy frontier between critic and reader practically disappears when we

discover that the most outspoken art critic, Morgan-Powell, was not content to simply write his regular articles in the newspaper but felt he must write letters to his own editor in rebuttal of the criticism he received from other readers. Morgan-Powell was thus both critic and reader in this exchange.⁶¹

The impression that one is witnessing an uncharted form of public debate is heightened by the fact that there was no specific place and no specific format within the newspaper which framed the discussion. Half the letters were relatively standard letters to the editor, published under a general heading which identified them as such. Most were concise comments (less than 200 words) headed up by a short title in bold print which summarized the point of view. These were rarely signed with a name, usually only initials or some kind of pseudonym.

The other half of the letters was comprised of longer articles displaying a headline. Usually, these were signed by the author, but not always. These contributions began with the address: "To the editor," and sometimes they were published alongside the more standard letters to the editor but their place in the newspaper was ill-defined. Newspapers published literary pages in the weekend editions and dedicated pages to the performing arts; regular theatre seasons and musical concerts were now assigned to specific pages in the paper and featured regular banners. However, the visual arts had no standardized place in the newspapers of the day and this is reflected in the relatively unstructured character of the public debate on the SE1913.

Challenging the Critic

The first line of attack on the critics was launched by Frederick Gold Lyman, father of the young painter who was most severely criticized.⁶² It should be mentioned that the painter himself was apparently still in Paris during the Spring Exhibition and would only return to Montreal in time to prepare for his solo exhibition to be held at the Art Association in May. It is also useful to know that the Lyman family was closely associated with the AAM. An aunt in the family had been a serious amateur artist; others had been collectors⁶³ and members of the board. Cleveland Morgan, who was just beginning his long involvement with the AAM, was John Lyman's cousin. There is no indication that the Lyman family was acting as a united clan in support of their prodigal son in his dealings with the AAM in 1913. It is more likely that most of this extended family had little more understanding of his artistic interests than the general art public of the day. Nevertheless, John G. Lyman was not an unknown quantity when he sent his works to the Spring Exhibitions. The hanging committee at the AAM knew who he was, even if no special pressure

was applied in favour of accepting his work or placing it favourably. His works had been accepted since he began sending them two years earlier.

The substance of Lyman Sr.'s attack was based on the poor track record of critics in the past. Frederick Gold Lyman warned readers against putting too much faith in the opinions of critics and recalled the famous quarrel between the Ruskin and Whistler in 1879; Whistler's paintings, then so criticized, had since become collector's items. This theme of the fallibility of critics was subsequently echoed both by John Lyman and Mortimer-Lamb.

Morgan-Powell however, was not impressed with this argument. He replied, quite logically, that the past record of critics in general was a specious argument when it came to defending the works on view at the Spring Exhibition. It is not because a work is fiercely criticized today that it necessarily has any particular merit.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, readers were anxious to check the opinions of the critics against other sources. One reader, for example, called upon the press to publish the opinions of some of the artists:

How interesting it would be, could we have the opinions of Delacroix, Millet, Manet and Whistler – especially Whistler – as to this recent Art Movement. But could you not somehow, for the benefit of your readers, let us know what such well-known artists as Mr. Brymner, Mr. Suzor Cote and Mr. Morrice think of it, who could speak with authority in Canada, and without incurring any accusation of ignorance and Philistinism? I know very little of the movement, and should be glad to understand it better.⁶⁵

In fact, *The Montreal Herald* had published just such an article, in which William Brymner, president of the Royal Academy and director of the art school at the Art Association, had come out in clear support of his former pupils, Jackson and Hewton. Other artists consulted were Laura Muntz (1860–1930) (who cautiously supported the young artists, “if they are sincere”) and George Horne-Russell (1861–1933) who was non-committal. Maurice Cullen, on the other hand, was positively vicious in his attack on them and treated the paintings as a hoax.⁶⁶

Mortimer-Lamb formulated a second line of attack on the critics. Since critics are fallible in their judgement of art, he argued, they should concentrate on explaining the aims of the artists. “There is but one excuse for art criticism, that of guiding public opinion to a clearer conception of the significance of art ... In short [the critic], must be a man of the broadest sympathies and of extraordinary catholicity of taste, capable of disregarding

his own personal predilections in favour of any one school of expression, in order to determine conscientiously and impartially the art value of any work on which he is called upon to pass judgment.”⁶⁷

This position elicits a sarcastic reaction on the part of another reader (H.R.W. – Homer Ransford Watson). The only things missing from Mortimer-Lamb’s portrait of the ideal critic, he suggests, “are his wings.” Watson calls upon the knowledgeable observer to have the courage of his convictions and not to allow himself to be intimidated by “fear that posterity may possibly vote him a dunce for his misjudging of contemporary masterpieces.”⁶⁸ Watson is clearly struggling with the fact that art historical judgment can no longer be considered in terms of immutable standards of beauty and truth. Standards change and an art critic lives in the fear of being seen as a “dunce” by future generations. This is a particularly significant argument because it not only tends to confirm Watson’s own conservative tastes, but also acknowledges the existence of contrary modernist views.

Mortimer-Lamb wanted the critic to be an objective reporter, someone who could explain the work of art on its own terms. This goal was supported by another reader in a letter written in reaction to the newspaper coverage of the solo exhibition of John Lyman in May 1913. This letter, signed simply “A Reader,” expressed surprise that *The Montreal Star* had published two very different reviews of the show. The first one to appear was signed by a new critic (M.C.J.)⁶⁹ and the other by the regular critic (Morgan-Powell). The second was not technically, as the reader believed, a review published by the newspaper. It was in fact a letter to the editor written by Morgan-Powell. Apparently, he had not been assigned to cover this solo exhibition of Lyman’s paintings and could only make his opinion felt by sending a 1,600-word letter to the editor.⁷⁰ Why two reviews, this reader asks? Either the first critic did a good job and it should not be necessary to cover the show again or he did a bad job and it should not have been published.⁷¹ The publication of two reviews was inconsistent with the idea that an objective critic should transmit an authoritative viewpoint.

The debate entered into its third and final round when it attempted to define the limits of legitimate art criticism. Mortimer-Lamb finally declared that art criticism was at best “futile,” because it does not help the public appreciate art, and at worst “wicked,” since it can prejudice the public against discovering new forms of art.⁷² Visibly stung by this criticism, Morgan-Powell heatedly replied: “Sir, I would be the last person in the world to wish to prejudice anybody against any work of art. What I am interested in doing is in warning the public against fakirs who invite them to pay good Canadian money for daubs that have no relation to art, that possess no taste, value, or

significance, and that are judged by the leading figures in the art world of today as having no right to be considered works of art.”⁷³

Lyman now joined directly in the debate. He argued that, because it is valued by art journals and collectors of fine art all over Europe, the very criteria invoked by Morgan-Powell, Post-Impressionism constitutes a recognized school of art:

Anyone who consults the articles that appeared in many London journals during the Post-Impressionist exhibitions of the last two years can assure himself that there are many who intend to laugh last and best. Many pictures from these shows were bought for English collections; and as for Paris – scarcely a remaining work of the dead Post-Impressionists can be found on the market at any price. This week is being held a show of eleven paintings by Matisse [at Bernheim-Jeune in Paris], just brought back from Tangier, eight of which were bought before they could be exhibited at prices between \$2,000 and \$4,000. His works are to be found in many of the great private collections of France, Austria, Germany, Russia, etc. I may also add that if S.M.P. had gone a little deeper into his New York journalistic literature, he would know that over two hundred Post-Impressionist works were bought at the first exhibition held there recently.⁷⁴

And so this unprecedented public debate on the role of the critic draws to a close.

Modernism and Tradition in the English-Montreal Art World of 1913

It is interesting to note that this debate on the role of the critic did not lead anyone to the point of actually defending Post-Impressionism. There was no equivalent among the Montreal critics, collectors, or dealers who could, like Roger Fry or C. Lewis Hind in London, John Quinn or Clara Davidge in New York, or Arthur Jerome Eddy in Chicago, take up the crusade for the modern European art movements. Even the most severe critics of Morgan-Powell hesitated when it came to an outright defence of the ideas underlying Post-Impressionism. Mortimer-Lamb took pains to distinguish between the paintings of Hewton and Jackson on the one hand and those of Lyman on the other: “[B]y no stretch of fancy can these efforts [by Hewton and Jackson] be classified as ‘post-impressionistic.’ Mr Lyman alone represents the more advanced tendencies ... I do not propose for a moment, however, to pose as

an apologist for Mr. Lyman.”⁷⁵ It is not certain that Lyman appreciated being singled out in such a fashion. He stated flatly in one of his letters to the editor of *The Montreal Star*: “As to the MERITS of Post-Impressionism, those who will refer to my first letter can assure themselves that I said NOTHING, and I persist in saying nothing.”⁷⁶

One might conclude that this lack of outright support for Post-Impressionism and modernist painting in general is proof enough of the traditional nature of the Montreal art world at the time. I would admit that it is an indication of the provincial nature of Montreal as compared to the major centres of Paris, London, and New York but I would argue that it is not particularly useful to analyze the conflicts at the SE1913 in terms of the opposition between modernism and tradition. Esther Trépanier has argued against the idea of seeing the European experience as a sort of “ideal type” against which the evolution of the art world in Quebec should be measured.⁷⁷ Her arguments appear to me to be valid for North America in general at this time. The dynamics of the situation in Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century were quite different from those in a country like France with a strong academic tradition and a state which traditionally played an important role in the process of consecration of artists. In current studies of the period, the perception of the forces of resistance to modernism in the arts is often far from clear. It is rare, in fact, that these adversaries are examined closely. Most of the time, they have a purely negative existence, as foils to the protagonists of modernism. They are seen as conservative, traditional, or academic but the terms are used almost interchangeably with little conceptual content.⁷⁸ For example, the expression ‘Academic painting’ never has anything to do with a concept of painting officially endorsed by the RCA. Any attempt to portray its influence in this early period of its history as a force of tradition or conservatism would be problematic since the president, William Brymner (1855–1925), was also the most influential art teacher in Montreal and he actually defended the works done by his former students, Hewton and Jackson.

In an interview published in *The Montreal Herald* during the controversy about the Post-Impressionist paintings, Brymner stated:

I think that Hewton is a most promising young fellow, and I think the same of Jackson. I don't like those things of what-you-call-ems, [oblique reference to Lyman who had not studied in Montreal but had gone directly to Europe] I don't know what he's driving at; but Jackson and Hewton are extremely promising men. I tell you it would be a pretty tame exhibition if you had everything the same.⁷⁹

In fact, the term ‘academic’ is generally used as a rhetorical device to designate paintings, of various styles, which were highly esteemed by an older generation of collectors, critics and dealers. Interestingly enough, the commentary surrounding the SE1913 has never been examined to see what it had to say about this type of painting.

We find that the painting hung in the place of honour at the exhibition was a work by Homer Watson (one of the authors of a letter to the editor as noted above and a future president of the RCA). It was entitled *Stumpers at Nightfall* and was, as usual, a variation on the Barbizon school of painting which Watson himself had helped to popularize in Canada during the 1880s. This would certainly tend to confirm the idea that conservative tastes dominated in Montreal. However, it is worth noting that this painting was flanked by two other paintings: one by Cullen, *Spring Thaw*, which won the prestigious Jessie Dow Prize for the best oil painting of the show, the other *Morning* by William Henry Clapp (1879–1954). At that time Clapp was working on canvases with highly saturated lighting and a divided brush stroke, as evidenced in his painting entitled *The New Church* (1910) in the National Gallery collection.⁸⁰ These are three very different paintings by three generations of painters.

More importantly, we find that the Watson painting did not enjoy a warm reception in the press of the time. *The Gazette* simply mentions his paintings without favourable or negative comment. *The Montreal Star* does not even mention his *Stumpers* but criticizes his execution in another of his paintings on view, *Rolling Surf, Louisburg*. “The rocks are altogether too spongy and amorphous,” complains Morgan-Powell.⁸¹ *The Montreal Herald* does not mention Watson’s work at all. As for the *Montreal Daily Witness*, the review is quite critical:

The place of honour in the main gallery is given up to a picture by Mr. Homer Watson – “Stumpers at Night-Fall” ... There is nothing new either in subject or treatment. The picture is painted well, but without inspiration. It is a studio picture – an excellent variation of a hackneyed theme and that is all.⁸²

It is hardly surprising in this context that Watson would heap sarcasm on Mortimer-Lamb’s description of the critic as someone who should explain a painting in terms of the goals the painter set for himself. Certainly no one seemed to be concerned about explaining his concept of painting.⁸³

The first part of this paper tried to show that the art world in Montreal and the Spring Exhibitions, in particular, were part of a general modernizing

process of society, characterized by annual art exhibitions and newspaper coverage focusing on how things were changing. Read from this perspective, there is much evidence to indicate that the organizing forces behind the SE1913 were more concerned about educating the Montreal public about new trends in painting than they were with defending traditional concepts of art.

First of all, it should be noted that the Art Association provided prime exhibition space for the three young artists whose work was most representative of the new trends in painting coming out of Paris. Jackson and Hewton had a joint show just before the Spring Exhibition (17 February – 1 March 1913) and Lyman had a solo exhibition just after (21–31 May 1913). The exhibition space was provided free of charge, with only a small commission charged on the sale of paintings. Since, in both cases, sales were practically non-existent, this meant that the entire cost of the exhibitions was borne by the AAM. At the very least, offering such a venue to these artists clearly shows an open attitude towards new trends in art and a desire to bring them to the light of public discussion.

Secondly, if we look beyond the general tirades against Post-Impressionism, we see that the critics were willing to try to understand the visual experiments of young artists whom they felt were sincere. The criticism of Jackson and Hewton, two artists who had studied at the school of the Art Association, was more nuanced than it was in the case of Lyman who had left Montreal to study directly in Europe. This is also true of the reaction to Emily Coonan's paintings which generally received favourable and, in some cases, enthusiastic reviews⁸⁴ in spite of the fact that her work was obviously concerned first and foremost with "painterly" issues rather than any significant subject matter.⁸⁵

The point here is not to argue that these critics were in favour of modernism but simply that the art world, at this time and place, was not primarily structured by the battle between modernism and tradition. It is true that there were critics and readers who were upset by the lack of fine drawing or the eccentric use of colour in the paintings shown by Lyman, Hewton, and Jackson, but on the whole, what the critics wanted was an art of their day, an art that was in synchrony with a changing world.

For most of the critics in the English-language press, this meant the birth of a truly Canadian art. His commentary on SE1913 makes it clear that the critic of the *Montreal Daily Witness*, a newspaper dedicated to social and political reform, would have been horrified to see himself portrayed as a conservative:

Our younger artists are well abreast of the times. They are bound to no traditions of the "old masters." Overdrawn figures in hard and

waxen atmosphere are being relegated to museums, photography is driving them away, and in their place is coming luminosity and life. A revolution is coming over art, and, if the many talented young artists whom we have among us are encouraged, that revolution will flame up in Canada, and Canadians will bring their intelligence to bear on art, as they have already done on science, industry and commerce. To encourage the growth of art is a necessary step in national self-development.⁸⁶

In other cases, the emphasis on defining a Canadian art may be considered conservative but only if the term is clearly separated from the notion of defending well-established practices, inherited from the past. At the turn of the twentieth century, many of the most powerful conservative forces were associated with industry and Empire. Their most cherished hopes involved transforming the world, not keeping it as it was. Tradition was to be banished to the realms of folklore.

William R. Watson, who had been writing reviews for *The Gazette* since 1910, could perhaps be understood in this light. His interest in the show was precise: Have Canadian artists been able to capture the Canadian soul in their paintings? He wanted to find someone who could do for Canadian art “what Pissarro does for the streets of Paris, what Franz Thaulow does for Norwegian rivers, and what William Maris does for Dutch meadows.” Watson awards the highest marks on his chart to Cullen for the skill he manifested in rendering snow scenes. This painter “puts character into the snow, tight as a drum under the rod of zero, and soft in the state of thaw. He gives the clear, cold outlines of a zero day without hardness, and we feel that they are Canadian winters and none other.”⁸⁷

The public debate surrounding the Spring Exhibition at the Art Association in Montreal in 1913 was not primarily about modernism against tradition. It was a spectacular moment in an ongoing debate about how artists should reconcile the influence of developments in the international art world with an art that reflected the specific realities of time and place in Canada.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Joan Roberts and Laurier Lacroix who made helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

- 1 Over fifty articles appeared in the newspapers of the day. A list in chronological order of the contemporary press coverage can be found below in *Appendix 1: Press*

- coverage of the Spring Exhibition and the John Lyman solo exhibition at the Montreal Art Association in 1913.
- 2 *The Thirtieth Spring Exhibition of Oils, Water Colours, etc. To be Held in the Art Gallery From March Twenty-sixth Until April Nineteenth, Nineteen Hundred and Thirteen* (Montreal: Art Association of Montreal, 1913).
 - 3 The public was admitted from Monday to Saturday from 10.00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. for an admission price of 25 cents. The exhibition was closed on Sundays and admission was free on Thursdays. The galleries were also open on Tuesday and Friday evenings from 8:00 to 10:00 pm for ten cents.
 - 4 Art Association of Montreal, *The Fifty-Second Report Being for the Year Nineteen Hundred and Thirteen* (Montreal: Art Association of Montreal, 1914), 8.
 - 5 “Art Exhibition Attracted 28,000,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 21 Apr. 1913, 1.
 - 6 *The Year Book of Canadian Art, 1913, compiled by the Arts & Letters Club of Toronto: Literature, Architecture, Music, Painting, Sculpture* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, Limited, 1913), 233.
 - 7 It is not mentioned in J. Russell HARPER, *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977). Brian Foss sees the “virulent press reaction” to the 1913 Spring Exhibition as demonstrating the degree to which impressionist art had achieved establishment status in Montreal. See Brian FOSS, “Into the New Century: Painting, c. 1890–1914,” in *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss and Sandra Paikowsky (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30.
 - 8 Joan MURRAY, *The Birth of the Modern: Post-Impressionism in Canadian Art, 1900–1920* (Oshawa, ON: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2001), 15–16.
 - 9 Ross KING, *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 80. See also 103–104.
 - 10 Jean-René OSTIGUY, *Modernism in Quebec Art, 1916–1946* (Ottawa, ON: National Gallery of Canada, National Museums of Canada, 1982), 18.
 - 11 Louise DOMPIERRE, *John Lyman, 1886–1967* (Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986), 37.
 - 12 No comprehensive study of the history of these exhibitions exists. Evelyn McMann has compiled an invaluable reference work on the Spring Exhibitions from the annual catalogues which were printed each year. See E. MCMANN, *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts formerly Art Association of Montreal: Spring Exhibitions 1880–1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). For the early history of the Art Association of Montreal, see Jean TRUDEL, “L’Art Association of Montreal. Les années d’incertitude : 1863–1877, Première partie,” *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d’histoire de l’art canadien* 29 (2008): 117–43, and “Deuxième partie,” *JCAH/AHAC* 30 (2009): 92–113. For a more general summary, see Georges-Hébert GERMAIN, *A City’s Museum: A History of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2007) and Pierre LEDUC, “Les origines et le développement de l’Art Association de Montréal (1860–1912)” (MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 1963).
 - 13 These numbers are drawn from an analysis of the catalogues of the Spring Exhibition at the Art Association of Montreal in 1888 and 1913.
 - 14 “Art and the Association,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 22 Apr. 1910.

- 15 The population of the island of Montreal almost tripled (287%) between 1881 and 1911. Paul-André LINTEAU, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Boréal, 2000), 40 and 160. For an overview of the rapid development of commercial culture in Montreal during this period, see Yvan LAMONDE “Naissance et affirmation de la culture commercialisée,” in *Histoire de Montréal et de sa région*, ed. Dany Fougères (Quebec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2012), 775–99.
- 16 Art Association of Montreal, *The Fifty-Second Report*, 8. 7,728 visitors attended the RCA exhibition as compared to 15,266 at the Spring Exhibition.
- 17 “Art and the Association,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 22 Apr. 1910.
- 18 “Art Show Looks As If the Hanging Committee Slept,” *The Montreal Herald*, 15 Mar. 1912.
- 19 “Sold Many Pictures – Spring Art Exhibition has been a financial help to artists,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 22 Mar. 1912, 16. According to the catalogue, 377 works were shown in 1912. If it is true that 300 works were rejected by the hanging committee in 1912, this would mean that over 40% of the works submitted were refused. By way of comparison, 496 works were accepted in the 1913 exhibition.
- 20 “The Fine Arts,” *The Montreal Star*, 15 Mar. 1912. This article is not signed but it was most likely written by Samuel Morgan-Powell who was already covering cultural events at *The Montreal Star* at that time. He only began signing his articles in 1913.
- 21 “Artists Divided Over ‘Art’ Shown by the Futurists,” *The Montreal Herald*, 28 Mar. 1913, 6.
- 22 See Laurier LACROIX, “The Surprise of Today Is the Commonplace of Tomorrow: How Impressionism Was Received in Canada,” in *Visions of Light and Air: Canadian Impressionism, 1885–1920*, ed. Carol Lowrey (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1995), 41–53.
- 23 “Art Matters,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), 18 Apr. 1883, 2.
- 24 MURRAY, *The Birth of the Modern*, 15.
- 25 KING, *Defiant Spirits*, 103.
- 26 The length of the period covered after the closing of the exhibition is due to the fact that the Art Association held a solo exhibition devoted to the works of John Lyman (21–31 May 1913), shortly after the Spring Exhibition closed on 19 April. Lyman’s work was at the heart of the debate during the Spring Exhibition and the newspaper coverage reads as a continuous conversation over the whole period. Articles published during the Lyman exhibition commented on articles written during the Spring Exhibition.
- 27 Fortunately, these scrapbooks have been digitized by the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative. Accessed 22 Mar. 2013, <http://cwahi.concordia.ca/sources/resources/MMFA-scrapbooks.php>.
- 28 Circulation figures were obtained from *The Canadian Newspaper Directory* (Montreal and Toronto: A. McKim Ltd., 1913).
- 29 My thanks to Pierre Anctil for the time he spent poring over the *Keneder Adler* to help me on this point.
- 30 For more information on Albert Laberge (1871–1960), see Esther TRÉPANIÉ, “Deux portraits de la critique d’art des années vingt. Albert Laberge et Jean Chauvin,” *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d’histoire de l’art canadien* 12:2 (1989): 144–51.

- 31 Unsigned [Albert Laberge], “Ouverture de l’exposition de peintures à la galerie des arts,” *La Presse*, 26 Mar. 1913.
- 32 Léon LORRAIN, “Le Salon,” *Le Devoir*, 31 Mar. 1913, 1; Un amateur, “Le Dernier Salon. Autour de la critique faite à ce sujet,” *Le Pays* (Montreal), 19 Apr. 1913, 2. *Le Pays* was a left-wing weekly staunchly opposed to the nationalism of Henri Bourassa’s daily newspaper, *Le Devoir*.
- 33 See infra note 55.
- 34 John Irwin COOPER, *Montreal, A Brief History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1969), 118. According to Cooper, “For about a year, 1913–1914, the ownership [of *The Montreal Herald*] appears to have been under no political domination whatsoever.”
- 35 “Le Salon,” *Le Devoir*, 31 Mar. 1913, 1.
- 36 “Post-Impressionists Shock Local Art Lovers at the Spring Art Exhibition,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 26 Mar. 1913, 5. See also: “Futurist Pictures Cause Stir at Spring Art Exhibit,” *The Montreal Herald*, 26 Mar. 1913, 3.
- 37 Jackson and Hewton are mentioned together, with encouraging remarks, in *The Montreal Star*, 15 Mar. 1912.
- 38 *The Montreal Star*, 19 Mar. 1912. It is likely that the reviewer in *The Montreal Star* is Morgan-Powell but the articles are not signed at this date.
- 39 William R. WATSON, “Post-Impressionism,” *The Gazette*, 30 Mar. 1912. See infra note 56.
- 40 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, “Essays, Fugues Adventures and Improvisation,” *The Montreal Star*, 25 May 1913, 2.
- 41 J.B. BULLEN, *Post-Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception* (London: Routledge, 1988), xv.
- 42 Milton W. BROWN, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Abbeville Press, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1988), 72–73. It should be remembered that Roger Fry was curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from 1906 until 1910.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 108.
- 44 “Big Crowds at Art Gallery. Cubists Exhibition Next?,” *Montreal Daily Witness*, 11 Apr. 1913, 5. “Pictures Seen by Twelve Thousand,” *The Gazette*, 17 Apr. 1913. The Armory Show closed in Chicago on 16 April, while the Spring Exhibition closed in Montreal three days later. The idea that Montreal had no venue capable of accommodating the Armory Show exhibition should probably be taken with a grain of salt. In fact, the shows in Chicago and especially Boston were drastically reduced versions of the show held in New York. The Boston version comprised around 300 works, entirely European, which was actually smaller than the Spring Exhibition in Montreal. One can well imagine however, that there would have been major logistical problems (with insurance companies and custom brokers at least) in bringing the paintings to Montreal.
- 45 Marius DE ZAYAS, “Art Criticism and Picasso,” *The Montreal Star*, 3 June 1913, 11.
- 46 John G. LYMAN, “To the Editor: Mr. John G. Lyman Writes in Defence of Post-Impressionism,” *The Montreal Star*, 1 May 1913, 10.
- 47 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, “To the Editor: Some Post-Impressionistic Thoughts on the Post-Impressionist Movement,” *The Montreal Star*, 10 May 1913. See also Royal CORTISSOZ, “The Post-Impressionist Illusion,” *Century* 85 (April 1913):

- 805–10, 812, 814, 815. Also available on the internet. Accessed 22 Mar. 2013, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5567/>. Royal Cortissoz, who was art critic at the *New York Tribune*, came to Montreal to lecture at the Art Association in January 1911. *Montreal Daily Witness*, 26 Jan. 1911.
- 48 MURRAY, *The Birth of the Modern*, 11.
- 49 Roger FRY, “The Grafton Gallery – Part 1,” *The Nation*, 19 Nov. 1910. Reprinted in BULLEN, *Post-Impressionists in England*, 120.
- 50 William R. WATSON, “Post-Impressionism,” *The Gazette*, 30 Mar. 1912.
- 51 “Artists Divided Over ‘Art’ Shown by the Futurists,” *The Montreal Herald*, 28 Mar. 1913, 6.
- 52 Carl BERGER, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
- 53 Guillaume APOLLINAIRE, “Le dernier état de la peinture,” *L'intransigeant* (Paris), 14 Feb. 1911, reproduced in APOLLINAIRE, *Chroniques d'art 1901–1918* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 186–87. The exhibition entitled “Manet and the Post-Impressionists,” was held in the Grafton Galleries in November 1910.
- 54 See Esther TRÉPANIÉ, “Les enjeux artistiques à Montréal. Le discours critique dans la presse montréalaise de 1915 à 1930,” in *Peindre à Montréal, 1915–1930 : les peintres de la Montée Saint-Michel et leurs contemporains*, ed. Laurier Lacroix (Montreal: Musée du Québec, 1996), 87–107; Hélène SICOTTE, “Walter Abell, Robert Ayre, Graham McInnes : aperçu de la perspective sociale dans la critique d'art canadienne entre 1935 et 1945” (MA thesis, UQAM, 1992); Paul H. WALTON, “Beauty My Mistress: Hector Charlesworth as Art Critic,” *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 15:1 (1992): 84–107.
- 55 No systematic study of his place in the Montreal art world has been attempted to date. According to contemporary biographical sources, Morgan-Powell was born in England and worked as a journalist, first in Yorkshire, then in British colonies in Africa and British Guyana before coming to Montreal in 1905. He was first hired at *Montreal Daily Witness* and later moved over to *The Montreal Star*. His first and lasting passion was for the theatre and he was a founding member of the Montreal Repertory Theatre in 1929. He did little art criticism after 1930. See Henry J. MORGAN, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*, 2nd edition (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1912); Anon., “Our Speakers and Why,” *Bulletin of the Special Library Association* 27:5 (May–June 1936): 148.
- 56 William R. WATSON, “Canadian Spirit in Local Pictures,” *The Gazette*, 16 Apr. 1913, 14. For more information on Watson, see his memoirs: William R. WATSON, *Retrospective: Recollections of a Montreal Art Dealer* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).
- 57 Harold Mortimer-Lamb was born in Surrey, England, and settled in British Columbia in 1889 where he worked in journalism and eventually was hired as Secretary Treasurer of the Provincial Mining Association. He also became interested in photography and when he transferred to Montreal in 1905 he became involved in the Pictorialist movement. Together with Sidney Carter, he organized the International Canadian Pictorialist Exhibition, held in 1907 in the rooms of the Art Association. It was through his association with the AAM that he became acquainted with A.Y. Jackson. Mortimer-Lamb subsequently became a regular correspondent for the British magazine *Photograms of the Year*. After 1913, he wrote art criticism and

he curated an exhibition of Tom Thompson's paintings in Montreal in 1919. For biographical information on Lamb, see Ann THOMAS, "Between a Hard Edge and a Soft Curve: Modernism in Canadian Photography," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 21 (2000): 74–92.

- 58 See Appendix 1: nos. 12, 19, 21, 25, 51. Julius Meier-Graffe and Haldane McFall were amongst the names of international art historians mentioned.
- 59 See the letters written by John G. Lyman as well as those by his father and by the mother of the painter Randolph Hewton (see Appendix 1: nos. 17, 26, 39, 43).
- 60 H.R.W., "To the Editor: Behind the Scenes," *The Montreal Star*, 16 Apr. 1913.
- 61 See Appendix 1: nos. 30, 36, 40, 42, 48.
- 62 F. Gold LYMAN, "To the Editor: Mr. J.G. Lyman's Paintings," *The Montreal Star*, 1 Apr. 1913, 10.
- 63 Henry Lyman and Frederick Styles Lyman are listed among the major Montreal art collectors during this period. See Janet M. BROOKE, *Discerning Tastes: Montreal Collectors 1880–1920* (Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), 243. The painter's father, F.G. Lyman, had come to Montreal from the United States around 1879 to work in the firm of Henry Lyman. His sister, Anna Elizabeth Lyman, later joined him and subsequently met and married James Morgan Jr. Other members of the various branches of the Lyman family were members of the Art Association as well.
- 64 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, "To the Editor: Some Post-Impressionistic Thoughts on the Post-Impressionist Movement," *The Montreal Star*, 10 May 1913, 12.
- 65 G.W. "To the Editor: Remembers the 'Horrible Woman'," *The Montreal Star*, 16 Apr. 1913, 22.
- 66 "Artists Divided Over 'Art' Shown by the Futurists," *The Montreal Herald*, 28 Mar. 1913, 6.
- 67 H. MORTIMER-LAMB, "Post-Impression Creates Much Discussion Locally," *The Montreal Star*, 7 Apr. 1913, 10.
- 68 H.R.W., "To the Editor: Behind the Scenes." *The Montreal Star*, 16 Apr. 1913, 22.
- 69 M.C.J., "Mr. Lyman Shows Clever Pictures at the Gallery but His Art Lacks Distinction and is Largely Imitative," *The Montreal Star*, 21 May 1913, 2.
- 70 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, "To the Editor: Essays, Fugues, Adventures and Improvisation," *The Montreal Star*, 23 May 1913, 2.
- 71 Reader, "To the Editor: Art Criticisms," *The Montreal Star*, 2 June 1913, 10.
- 72 H. MORTIMER-LAMB, "To the Editor: Art Criticism and the Public," *The Montreal Star*, 14 May 1913, 10.
- 73 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, "To the Editor: Is An Art Critic a Necessary Evil?," *The Montreal Star*, 16 May 1913, 12.
- 74 John G. LYMAN, "To the Editor: Mr. John G. Lyman Writes in Defence of Post-Impressionism," *The Montreal Star*, 1 May 1913, 12. This same argument is made in more detailed fashion in his reply to Morgan-Powell's statement on the limits of acceptable art on 16 May. The reference to a recent exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings shown in New York is of course the Armory Show of 1913.
- 75 H. MORTIMER-LAMB, "To the Editor: Art and Art Critics," *The Montreal Star*, 21 Apr. 1913, 10.
- 76 John G. LYMAN, "To the Editor: John G. Lyman: In Defence of Post-Impressionist Painting," *The Montreal Star*, 17 May 1913, 12. The emphasis is Lyman's.

- 77 Esther TRÉPANIÉ, *Peinture et modernité au Québec, 1919-1939* (Montreal: Éditions Nota bene, 1998), II.
- 78 Esther Trépanier's article on the French-language critics in Montreal between 1915 and 1930 constitutes an exception in this regard: TRÉPANIÉ, "Les enjeux artistiques à Montréal," 87-107.
- 79 "Artists Divided Over 'Art' Shown by the Futurists," *The Montreal Herald*, 28 Mar. 1913, 6.
- 80 The paintings by Watson and Clapp can no longer be located. For the information on the hanging of the paintings, see "Post-Impressionists Shock Local Art Lovers at the Spring Art Exhibition," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 26 Mar. 1913, 5.
- 81 Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, "Art and the Post-Impressionists," *The Montreal Star*, 29 Mar. 1913, 22.
- 82 See "Spring Exhibition at Art Gallery," *The Gazette*, 26 Mar. 1913, 13; Samuel MORGAN-POWELL, "Art and the Post-Impressionists," *The Montreal Star*, 29 Mar. 1913, 22; and "Post-Impressionists Shock Local Art Lovers at the Spring Art Exhibition," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 26 Mar. 1913, 5.
- 83 H.R.W., "To the Editor: Behind the Scenes."
- 84 The reviewer in *The Gazette* lauded Coonan's paintings at the 1913 Spring Exhibition. "Spring Exhibition at Art Gallery," *The Gazette*, 26 Mar. 1913, 13. *The Montreal Herald* writes: "Miss Emily Coonan, the Point St. Charles prodigy of a year or two ago, has a group in her highly characteristic style and a portrait which shows a distinct advance in the sense of form." "Futurist Pictures Causes Stir at Spring Art Exhibit," *The Montreal Herald*, 26 Mar. 1913, 3.
- 85 Karen ANTAKI and Emily COONAN, *Emily Coonan 1885-1971* (Montreal: Concordia Art Gallery, 1987), 25.
- 86 "Spring Art Exhibition: Native vs Foreign Talent," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 17 Mar. 1913, 2.
- 87 William R. WATSON, "Canadian Spirit in Local Pictures," *The Gazette*, 16 Apr. 1913, 2.

Appendix 1: Press coverage of the Spring Exhibition and the John Lyman solo exhibition at the Montreal Art Association in 1913¹

Ref	Date, day	Newspaper, page	Author	Title	Words	Other information
1	1913-03-17 Monday	<i>The Witness</i> p.2 of 12	C.L.S.	Spring Art Exhibition Native vs Foreign Talent	800	
2	1913-03-25 Tuesday	<i>The Herald</i> p.6 of 14		APRONED ARTISTS VARNISH TO-DAY ON EVE OF SHOW Step-ladders and Pots Out at Gallery To-Day For Last Touches CURIOUS TANGLE OVER STATUARY Mr. Laliberte's Extra Work Rejected After He Had Been Asked For It	250	
3	1913-03-25 Tuesday	<i>The Star</i> p.1 of 24	S.M.P. [Samuel Morgan- Powell]	Art Association Exhibition Shows Notable Features Canadian Artists Have at Last Realized Possibilities of Canadian Art School Oil Paintings are Superior Section Recognition of Painters Who Have Waited Long for Honors Here	1,000	

1 All of the Montreal daily newspapers were examined. The only dailies which had no coverage at all were *Le Canada* and the fledgling Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Keneder Adler*. The only weeklies I was able to find that commented on the event were *Le Pays* and *The Mirror*. I decided to include in this corpus the articles and letters that were written about the solo exhibition of John Lyman, which was also held at the Art Association shortly after the Spring Exhibition. The writings on the two events form a single stream of commentary. Articles purportedly on the Lyman exhibition make frequent reference to earlier articles published on the Spring Exhibition. The period covered here begins then with the first articles announcing the upcoming Spring Exhibition (17 March 1913) through the period of the Spring Exhibition (26 March – 19 April) and the Lyman solo exhibition (15–31 May) up until 3 June 1913 when the last letter to the editor commenting on the recent exhibitions was published.

4	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>The Gazette</i> p.13 of 20	<p>SPRING EXHIBITION AT ART GALLERY Opened For Private View Last Night with Many Meritorious Works</p> <p>SOME POST IMPRESSIONS Over Four Hundred Exhibits with Standard Generally Higher Than in Past Years</p>	2,200
5	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>The Gazette</i> p.2 of 20	<p>Exhibition is Worthy of its Home Formal Opening of Spring Exhibit at New Art Gallery</p> <p>Post Impressionists A Few Examples of New School of Art – Work as a Whole Shows Improvement</p>	600
6	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.2 of 24	<p>Pretty Dresses Vied With Color at Art Opening Spring Exhibition Called Together a Fashionable Gathering – Pictures are Excellent</p> <p>HIGHER STANDARD OF OIL PAINTINGS Many Disappointed With Post-Impressionistic Work – Artists Disapprove.</p>	600
7	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>The Witness</i> p.5 of 12	<p>Post-Impressionists Shock Local Art Lovers at the Spring Art Exhibition</p> <p>Screaming Colours and Weird Drawing Cause Much Derisive Comment – General Standard of Exhibition is a High One – Marked Advance in Rendering of Typical Canadian Scenes by Native Artists – Younger Men of Impressionist School Now Taking the Lead</p>	2,400

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Date, day</i>	<i>Newspaper, page</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Other information</i>
8	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>La Patrie</i> p.4 of 14		Ouverture du Salon de Printemps à la galerie des arts hier soir	450	Photo of exhibition room. Quality of reproduction does not allow for works to be identified.
9	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>The Herald</i> p.3 of 16		Futurist Pictures Cause Stir at Spring Art Exhibit Does Committee Endorse "Infanticist School?" Patrons Want to Know Pictures in Nude Create Discussion Peculiar Color Effects in "The Bath" Lead to Many Speculations at Private View	1,250	Photo reproductions Title: At the Art Gallery Legend: Frau Werner Selbach, by Mr. E. Hodgson Smart (portrait)
10	1913-03-26 Wednesday	<i>La Presse</i> p.8 of 18		Ouverture de l'Exposition de Peintures à la Galerie des Arts	1,500	Photo reproductions: <i>Étude de femme</i> by Joseph Saint-Charles, <i>Paysage d'hiver, The Stray Calif</i> by Arthur D. Rosaire, <i>Bust of col. Jeff Burland</i> by O.E. (sic) Léger.
11	1913-03-28 Friday	<i>The Herald</i> p. 6 of 16		Artists Divided Over "Art" Shown by the Futurists "Promising Efforts," Say Some, "Lack Art," Declare Others Variety is Needed, Says the President Mr. Wm. Brymner Says Discussed Pictures Represent Phase of Modern Work	800	
12	1913-03-29 Saturday	<i>The Herald</i> p.16 of 32	"Truth"	To the Editor: Primal Academism as Best Name for Futurist School Correspondent Quotes From McFall in Attack on Post-Impressionist Pictures Now Being Shown at Spring Exhibition – Likely to Mislead Public	550	Letter to the editor

13	1913-03-29 Saturday	<i>La Presse</i> p.16 of 40	Au Salon de Peinture à la Galerie des Arts	900	Photo Reproductions: <i>Bagatelle</i> by John G. Lyman, <i>Le Retour, l'hiver</i> by J.-Ch. Franchère, <i>Ancien hôtel Dillon, 1790</i> by Georges Delfosse, <i>Portrait de Mme Selkirk Cross</i> by Clarence Gagnon.
14	1913-03-29 Saturday	<i>The Mirror</i> p.12 of 16	Palette	2,200	Photo Reproductions: View of the South-West Room Showing Arrangement of Pictures on Exhibition.
15	1913-03-29 Saturday	<i>The Star</i> p.22 of 40	S.M.P.	1,300	Photo Reproductions: Four works are reproduced: <i>A Brunette</i> , by John Lyman is juxtaposed with a <i>self portrait</i> by Robert Harris. <i>Picnic under the Trees</i> by Randolph S. Hewton is put in comparison with <i>A Country Road</i> , <i>Berthier</i> by Edmond Dyonnet. The caption underneath the photos reads as follows: "The pictures reproduced above afford a sufficiently striking comparison between the Post-Impressionist style and the same style of painting. The two portraits, side by side, illustrate the difference. That on the left, <i>A Brunette</i> , is a so-called Post-Impressionist portrait. Note in particular the distorted hands. That on the right is Mr. Harris's splendid portrait of himself. The two landscapes are equally informing. Mr. Hewton's <i>Picnic Under the Trees</i> is—what it is. Mr. Dyonnet's <i>Country Road</i> , <i>Berthier</i> is a fine example of modern landscape painting."
16	1913-03-31 Monday	<i>Le Devoir</i> p.1 of 8	Léon Lorrain	1,600	Le Salon

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Date, day</i>	<i>Newspaper, page</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Other information</i>
17	1913-04-01 Tuesday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 24	F. Gold Lyman	To the Editor: Mr. J.G. Lyman's Paintings	300	Letter to the editor
18	1913-04-02 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.8 of 24	A.C.	Pleasure from Art	400	Addressed to women readers
19	1913-04-02 Wednesday	<i>The Witness</i> p.4 of 12	A lover of truth and beauty	To the Editor: The New Style of Painting	500	Letter to the editor
20	1913-04-02 Wednesday	<i>The Witness</i> p.4 of 12	ZILLAH	To the Editor	450	Letter to the editor
21	1913-04-07 Monday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 22	H. Mortimer- Lamb	To the Editor: Post Impression Creates Much Discussion Locally An Exhibitor at the Spring Exhibition Gives His Idea of the New Movement – Believes That Traditions, Conventions and Academic Teaching Should be Disregarded – Last Word Not Yet Said	600	Letter to the editor
22	1913-04-08 Tuesday	<i>The Witness</i> p.9 of 12		Picture Show Popular Gratifying Attendances at Spring Exhibition of Local Artists	50	
23	1913-04-11 Friday	<i>The Witness</i> p.5 of 12		Big Crowds at Art Gallery Cubists Exhibition Next?	600	
24	1913-04-12 Saturday	<i>Le Pays</i> p.2 of 10	Le Rapin	Dans le monde des beaux-arts	600	

25	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Gazette</i> p.14 of 24	William R. Watson	Canadian Spirit in Local Pictures Personal Views on Works Now Being Shown at Art Association The Lure of Winter Much Merit in Many Carvases at 30th Annual Spring Exhibition – Attendance Has Been Large	1,300
26	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 28	Marion Hewton	To the Editor: The Artist Doesn't Mind	100 Letter to the editor
27	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Witness</i> p.1 of 12		Art Exhibition Soon to Close Last Free Day To-morrow of Most Successful Display in the Association's History	300
28	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.22 of 28	H.R.W. [Homer Ransford Watson?]	To the Editor: Behind the Scenes	300 Letter to the editor
29	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.22 of 28	G.W.	To the Editor: Remembers the "Horrible Woman"	400 Letter to the editor
30	1913-04-16 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p. 22 of 28	Samuel Morgan- Powell	To the Editor: Post-Impressionism: What Julies Meier-Graffe Really Thinks Of It	1,200 Letter by the art critic to the editor of the newspaper for whom he works in response to letter by H. Mortimer-Lamb of 7 April 1913. Photo reproduction: Title above picture: "A Sample of Montreal Post Impressionism" Legend below picture: "'Wild Nature' by John G. Lyman. This is supposed to represent a scene in the Laurentians."

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Date, day</i>	<i>Newspaper, page</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Other information</i>
31	1913-04-17 Thursday	<i>The Gazette</i> p. 11 of 20		Pictures Seen By Twelve Thousand Largest Attendance at Art Gallery in History of Spring Exhibitions Some Future Plans Impossible to Get Cubist, Post-Impressionist and Futurist Works Being Shown in Chicago	500	
32	1913-04-19 Saturday	<i>Le Pays</i> p.2 of 10	Un amateur	Le Dernier Salon Autour de la critique faite à ce sujet	450	Letter to the editor
33	1913-04-21 Monday	<i>The Witness</i> p.1 of 12		Art Exhibition Attracted 28,000 Continuous Attractions Being Arranged for Art Gallery – Royal Canadian Academy Show Here This Year	350	
34	1913-04-21 Monday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 22	H. Mortimer- Lamb	To the Editor: Art and Art Critics	1,000	Letter to the editor
35	1913-04-21 Monday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 22	“Manchester Guardian”	To the Editor: Post Impressionism	150	Letter to the editor
36	1913-04-24 Thursday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 28	S. Morgan- Powell	To the Editor: A Few Post-Impressionistic Thoughts	400	Letter by the art critic to the editor of the newspaper for whom he works
37	1913-04-25 Friday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 28	A.R.C.A.	To the Editor: Opinions, Not Personalities	120	Letter to the editor

38	1913-04-30 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 24		To the Editor: The Very Latest "Issue"	250	Letter to the editor
39	1913-05-01 Thursday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 28	John G. Lyman	To the Editor: Mr. John G. Lyman Writes in Defence of Post-Impressionism	1,000	Letter to the editor
40	1913-05-10 Saturday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 40	S. Morgan- Powell	To the Editor: Some Post Impressionistic Thoughts on the Post Impressionist Movement	2,800	Letter by the art critic to the editor of the newspaper for whom he works
41	1913-05-14 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 24	H. Mortimer- Lamb	To the Editor: Art Criticism and the Public	600	Letter to the editor
42	1913-05-16 Friday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 24	S. Morgan- Powell	To the Editor: Is An Art Critic a Necessary Evil?	450	Letter by the art critic to the editor of the newspaper for whom he works
43	1913-05-17 Saturday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 40	John G. Lyman	To the Editor: John G. Lyman: In defence of Post Impressionist Painting	1,200	Letter to the editor
44	1913-05-21 Wednesday	<i>The Gazette</i> p.11 of 20		Pictures Will Revive Strife Post-Impressionistic Canvases by Mr. John G. Lyman on View Early Style Promising Color and Form Abandoned in Odd Compositions, but the Titles are Interesting	1,000	
45	1913-05-21 Wednesday	<i>The Herald</i> p.2 of 16		Advanced Art Has Many Crudities and Is Simple in Form No Doubt of Effect That Impressionistic Paintings Displayed at Art Gallery To-Day Have on Some of the Visitors Thought – Yellow Ladies Cause a Stir	600	

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Date, day</i>	<i>Newspaper, page</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Other information</i>
46	1913-05-21 Wednesday	<i>The Star</i> p.2 of 24	M.C.J.	Mr. Lyman Shows Clever Pictures At The Gallery But His Art Lacks Distinction and is Largely Imitative	1,000	
47	1913-05-22 Thursday	<i>The Witness</i> p.2 of 12		More Post-Impressionism at the Art Gallery Mr. John G. Lyman Shows Weird Collection of Pictures in the New Style – Maintains That Art Which Has a Natural Air is Nonsense	800	
48	1913-05-23 Friday	<i>The Star</i> p.2 of 28	S. Morgan-Powell	“To the Editor: Essays, Fugues, Adventures and Improvisation” Extraordinary Display of Crudities and Offensive Things at the Art Gallery	1,600	Letter by the art critic to the editor of the newspaper for whom he works
49	1913-05-23 Friday	<i>The Star</i> p.12 of 28	Ben Taplin	To the Editor: Post-Impressionism		Letter to the editor
50	1913-06-02 Monday	<i>The Star</i> p.10 of 24	“Reader”	To the Editor: Art Criticisms	75	Letter to the editor
51	1913-06-03 Tuesday	<i>The Star</i> p.11 of 24	E.B.W. Scott	To the Editor	100	Letter to the editor
52	1913-06-03 Tuesday	<i>The Star</i> p.11 of 24	Marius de Zayas	Art Criticism and Picasso	1,800	Photo reproduction: Picasso, <i>The Woman with a Pot of Mustard</i>

Le Salon de printemps de l'Art Association of Montreal en 1913 : anatomie d'un débat public

LORNE HUSTON

Le Salon de printemps à l'Art Association of Montreal, en 1913, a provoqué dans la presse montréalaise un tollé tel qu'on n'en avait jamais vu jusque-là. Plus de cinquante articles ont paru dans les journaux, y compris une vingtaine de lettres des lecteurs. La majorité de ces textes dénonçait de manière violente quelques toiles jugées « postimpressionnistes », et un nombre record de visiteurs se sont rués dans les nouvelles galeries de la rue Sherbrooke pour se faire leur propre opinion. Certains critiques de l'époque affirmaient même que l'exposition marquait un changement de cap dans la vie artistique montréalaise.

Avec le recul toutefois, force est de constater que les critiques d'antan se sont trompés. L'exposition est tombée dans l'oubli et, loin de marquer un point tournant, elle n'est mentionnée aujourd'hui que pour illustrer l'esprit conservateur qui dominait alors à Montréal. C'est cette contradiction entre les perceptions de l'époque et le jugement historique actuel qui est au cœur des réflexions dans ce texte.

Pour bien comprendre cette impression d'un tournant aux yeux des observateurs de 1913, il faut d'abord comprendre l'institution que fut le Salon de printemps, organisé annuellement à l'Art Association depuis 1880. On y découvre une vie artistique qui ne cesse de se déployer au rythme d'une période particulièrement dynamique de la vie culturelle et économique de la métropole. Le nombre d'artistes impliqués et d'objets exposés a triplé depuis les années 1880. Les styles esthétiques en vue se sont diversifiés. Les femmes artistes et les Canadiens français côtoyaient désormais leurs confrères d'origine britannique. Et tous les quotidiens parlaient, images à l'appui, de cet événement annuel qui rythmait désormais la vie artistique à Montréal.

Mais même dans le contexte de cette progression constante du salon, l'édition de 1913 reste exceptionnelle. Non pas tant par le nombre d'œuvres exposées ou d'artistes qui y participaient, mais par la réaction du public telle qu'elle s'est manifestée par le nombre de visiteurs, l'ampleur de la couverture de la presse et le nombre de lettres des lecteurs. La spécificité de cette réaction, en 1913, peut être résumée en cinq caractéristiques : 1) elle était

énorme; 2) elle était en anglais; 3) elle était prise en main par le *Montreal Star*; 4) elle était centrale; 5) elle était unique.

L'analyse présentée ici démontre que la violence de la réaction observée lors du Salon de 1913 ne pouvait être la conséquence inéluctable d'une confrontation entre des œuvres audacieuses et une opinion publique conservatrice. D'une part, les mêmes œuvres ne suscitaient pas les mêmes réactions du côté francophone et, d'autre part, des œuvres semblables avaient été exposées par les mêmes artistes controversés au cours des années précédentes sans provoquer un tel tollé. En fait, il semble que le facteur déclencheur de la réaction du public n'était pas tant les œuvres en vue à Montréal, mais les débats à Londres et surtout à New York, à l'occasion de l'Armory Show, qui se sont déroulés juste avant le salon de Montréal.

La dernière partie du texte tente, à la faveur de cette explosion de la parole publique, de mieux cerner les différentes dynamiques qui traversent la vie artistique montréalaise à cette époque. Ce sont les rapports entre le critique et son public qui retiennent d'abord l'attention. C'est la violence des propos des critiques qui jusqu'ici a frappé les historiens d'art. Toutefois ces feux d'artifices verbaux cachent, en vérité, une prise de parole publique sur l'art qui est toute nouvelle, balbutiante, et qui sera vivement contestée par des lecteurs. La présence du critique d'art dans les quotidiens est très récente en 1913. Les journalistes qui s'y frottent sont peu spécialisés et leurs textes n'ont ni une place, ni un statut précis dans le journal. Les lecteurs qui écrivent à la rédaction du journal, en revanche, ont souvent des qualifications précises dans le domaine des arts et ils n'hésitent pas à remettre en question l'autorité des critiques. Celle-ci est vivement contestée par les lecteurs qui somment les critiques d'expliquer les œuvres plutôt que de les juger de façon sommaire. Enfin, ces lecteurs rebelles invoquent l'existence d'instances de légitimation internationale (expositions, critiques, ventes à l'étranger) pour refuser à la critique montréalaise l'autorité de définir ce qui est légitime en art ici.

Après cette analyse des rapports entre le critique et son public, ce texte tente d'examiner l'opposition entre la modernité et la tradition. Contrairement à Londres, New York ou Chicago, personne à Montréal ne défend le postimpressionnisme en 1913, même pas ceux qui fulminent contre les critiques des journaux. Faut-il conclure de ce fait que le monde artistique à Montréal est enfoncé dans la tradition ? En fait, on découvre que l'opposition entre modernité et tradition à Montréal n'est pas ce qui donne le plus de sens aux débats de l'époque. Certes, il y a des critiques qui dénoncent la faiblesse du dessin ou l'usage excentrique de la couleur mais ils ne sont pas particulièrement attachés à la défense de la tradition. Il suffit de lire ce qu'ils écrivent sur les œuvres plus traditionnelles au salon de 1913, comme celles d'Homer Watson (1855-1936), pour s'en convaincre. Les organisateurs

des expositions à l'Art Association semblent beaucoup plus intéressés à initier le public montréalais aux nouvelles tendances en art canadien que de défendre des conceptions traditionnelles de l'art en général. Sinon comment comprendre la place qu'ils font aux jeunes artistes les plus controversés en leur accordant des expositions particulières juste avant et juste après le Salon de 1913 ? Comment comprendre aussi les prises de position beaucoup plus nuancées chez certains critiques sur des artistes comme A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Randolph Hewton (1888–1960) et Emily Coonan (1885–1971), dont ils ont pu suivre l'évolution au cours des années ?

Somme toute, cette analyse permet de jeter un nouvel éclairage sur le débat public qui eut lieu dans le milieu artistique anglophone lors du Salon de printemps de 1913. Il ne portait pas principalement sur le modernisme ou la tradition. Il constituait plutôt un moment spectaculaire dans un débat en cours sur l'affirmation d'un art national, en lien avec les réalités du lieu et de l'heure au Canada.