Bordering the Vernacular: J. Russell Harper and the Pursuit of a "People's Art"

ERIN MORTON

In 1970, curator and art historian J. Russell Harper (1914–1983) embarked on what would become one of his most extensive ventures into Canadian art history – a field that he helped to legitimate beginning with the publication of his monograph *Painting in Canada: A History* in 1966 and by holding such prominent positions as curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada between 1959 and 1963. It came in the form of a major survey exhibition entitled *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, which opened at the National Gallery of Canada in 1973, just ten years after Harper had left his curatorial post there.[1] Composed of 164 oil paintings, watercolours, woodcarvings, metal sculptures, and collages ranging from the mid-eighteenth century to 1971, *People's Art* is significant to the larger history of art exhibition in Canada because of the two primary factors that conditioned Harper's representational strategy. First, the exhibition grappled with what I wish to suggest was Harper's reaction to the exhaustion of a specific national project. We can now understand this project as constructing Canada as a peaceful settler society (rather than as a settler-colonial society founded on violence) and as being based in a limited white diversity that was iconized in representations of rural immigrant agricultural labour.[2] Harper's romanticized interpretation of this context lead him on a search for what he saw as a lost age defined by European settlers toiling the land, which went as far as sentimentalizing his own boyhood days in rural Ontario. As he put it in an undated manuscript draft of the *People's Art* exhibition catalogue:

> Throughout the years I have wanted desperately both to feel my own country and to help others to experience its inner fibre. These feelings, then not crystallized into words, go back to the days when in the older parts of Ontario as a boy I remember two venerable old grandfathers with long white beards, stump fences on the farms when white pines were pulled from the virgin soil by the oxen 'Buck' and 'Bright,' fields

Detail, William Panko, *Birds in a Garden/Blue Birds of Happiness*, ca. 1940, watercolour, 31.8 x 33.7 cm, Coll. Moira Swinton, Winnipeg, MB. (Photo: Ernest Mayer)

of waving golden wheat, massive oak shade trees, and a walled garden filled with herbs and flowers. There was something about it all that gave me a love for my boyhood countryside. I have since developed a love for many other corners of Canada.[3]

In order to understand what had been lost and, perhaps more importantly, to predict what the future would hold for art production in Canada, Harper sought out a material culture context to express the postwar transition from rural to urban life. Harper's lament for a nation was undeniably muddled with his sense of loss over the Canadian countryside of his childhood, even if most of this personalized sentiment was eventually edited out from both the *People's Art* exhibition catalogue and from the scholarly monograph that accompanied the project.[4]

What remained, however, speaks to the second factor that can be seen to have set the parameters of the 1973 exhibition: the fact that it developed at the interface of a broader transition within Canada, which political economists call post-Fordism.[5] This was the shift away from a postwar capitalist model – commonly referred to as "Fordism" after its namesake, Henry Ford – that built national economies on a domain of domestic mass production and consumption. Post-Fordism represented a transitional period in Canadian capitalism in which the Keynesian national economy became more deeply embedded in a regime of flexible accumulation tied to a transnational neoliberalism. Keynesian economics advanced the idea that the state should be prepared to intervene in order to maintain the demand for the consumption and the supply of goods.[6] As Keynesian states such as Canada focused on economic growth, full employment, and the social welfare of citizens in the immediate postwar period, they also struck a social "compromise between labour and capital" that was generally understood as the key to overall national prosperity.[7] On the other hand, this neoliberal approach was adverse to the notion of the isolated, individual labourer, instead insisting on overall "flexibility" in the labour market itself.[8] Neoliberal economic policy moved away from Keynesian principles by withdrawing from welfare systems and becoming hostile to all forms of labour organization that sought out restraints on the state accumulation of capital at the expense of worker employment.[9] In essence, the Keynesian-style accumulation of capital, which focused on assembly-line production, mass political organizing, and an interventionist welfare-state, transitioned to one of flexible accumulation under neoliberalism, by seeking out niche markets, decentralizing state involvement in manufacturing, and deregulating and privatizing production.[10]

Since it is often regarded as the symbolic beginning of the formation of neoliberal states throughout the world, 1973 is an important year in marking this transition.[11] Symbolic or not, the complex development of the post-industrial age in northern North America shaped the ways in which dominant cultural producers, such as Harper, thought about Canadian nationalism after 1973. The decline of a nationally articulated economy created a new social structure, which Harper referred to in his *People's Art* monograph with such statements as "contemporary living has assumed an overwhelming complexity."[12] Although Harper largely understood this complexity in terms of an overwhelming confrontation with mass technocultural change, a notion that was in line with a McLuhanistic understanding of an intensifying postmodern way of life, we might approach Harper's words from a contemporary perspective that also considers postmodernity's connection to post-industrialism under neoliberalism.[13] In this regard, the vernacular past for Harper could be seen as "a mine for a nationalism of reassurance," to borrow historian Ian McKay's phrase, in that Harper sought out material cultural remnants of rural life to bolster his ideas about Canada's cultural foundations.[14] Specifically, Harper needed reassurance that the Canada he imagined, one based on a nationalism that converted what McKay calls "a liberal empire, not a nation, and not a democratic state" into "a country like the one we now inhabit," was salvageable in cultural terms, even if it was not on the political-economic front.[15] Canada is best described, after all, as the process (and not the end result) of supplanting and defending a British, Protestant, liberal, capitalist imperialism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries against challenges to the hegemonic commonsense of these categories and ideologies.[16] This often meant the inclusion of ideas that stood in opposition to the liberal capitalist rationale in order to renegotiate its hegemony in particular moments of crisis such as 1973. On the cultural front, dominant players in the field of Canadian art such as Harper understood the importance of using historical objects of art and culture to bolster a nationalist project that sought out unity in the face of increased diversity and of the heightened decentralization of formerly nationalist sectors such as labour markets. Yet, by the early 1970s, few inhabitants of northern North America could actually see themselves as part of this nationalist endeavour, if they ever could, not only because of the shifts that post-industrialism wrought but also because of a domestic political climate that required increased management on a number of fronts.

This article argues that Harper's *People's Art* exhibition represented an important moment in the development of Canadian art historiography. Conditioned by the context of post-Fordist economic realities that marked

this period in general and the exhaustion of the specific discourse of settler-colonial nationalism, Harper attempted to reconstruct this discourse by presenting the agrarian settler roots of Canada's industrial period at the precipice of its post-industrial age. In this regard, Harper's pursuit of what he called the "Canadian vernacular" was an intensely ideological and politicized one that helped him and others to reassert the ideal of a Canada that never (or, at least, no longer) existed. I explore Harper's pursuit in four parts. First, I examine its connection to the emergence of post-industrialism in advanced capitalist societies such as Canada after 1973. This allows me to pay particular attention to the ways in which Canada's concurrent transitions from Fordism and from a Euro-bounded liberal diversity challenged previous definitions of the Canadian nation-state – and of Canadian art – that I believe Harper was after. Certainly, it is also important to note here that Harper made his intervention not through elite art, but by attempting to shine light on works that had previously been ignored by the Canadian art establishment. Next, I consider how *People's Art* was informed by the use and expansion of modernist-primitivist discourse in academic and museological Canadian art circles in the early to mid-twentieth century. This allows me to explore how Harper's ideas of a vernacular "people's art" developed alongside larger negotiations of such terms as "primitive" and "folk" art in and around one of the country's dominant postwar cultural institutions, the National Gallery of Canada. Of particular import in this regard is how the pursuit of a vernacular "people's art" actually created the language in which this quest was carried out. Harper and many of his contemporaries were in the process of locating both a material and a conceptual language in which to express their aspirations – one that, in effect, did not exist as they imagined it should. Initially, this pursuit focused on material culture terms, as the National Gallery looked to established experts in the field such as Harper to assess objects that would address centres of regional diversity in Canada and in order to help mobilize the reconstruction of a past nationalist identity with their authority. As the material base of the Canadian vernacular was established, the language to describe it followed, even if this language was ultimately a rearticulation of earlier ideas about ethnicized and racialized difference. My conclusion looks at Harper's organization of the *People's Art* project and reflects on its results.

(Neo)Liberal Hegemony and the "People's Art"

Perhaps it is not surprising that Harper's search for a Canadian cultural nationalism in the *People's Art* exhibition took him to popular art production given his status as a liberal federal nationalist and considering his influence

on developing Canadian art history as a discipline that extended that ideology.[17] He is probably best known as "a determined pioneer in the history of art in Canada"[18] because of his tireless mapping of the field in museological and academic circles. This pursuit would ultimately earn him the title "father of Canadian art history,"[19] a distinction he attained through producing one of the first dictionaries of Canadian artists, *Early Painters and Engravers in Canada* (1970); the first bilingual survey text in the field, *Painting in Canada: A History* (1966); and his monographic studies of late nineteenth-century settler-colonial artists, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (1971) and *Kreighoff* (1979).[20] He also held various posts in cultural institutions across Canada, including curator of Lee College, Hart House, at the University of Toronto (1947–50); chief cataloguer at the Royal Ontario Museum (1948–52); archivist at the New Brunswick Museum (1952–56); and curator of the Beaverbrook Art Collection (1957–59), before taking up the prominent positions of curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada (1959–63) and chief curator of the McCord Museum in Montreal (1965–68), where he also lectured at Sir George Williams (now Concordia) University (1967–79).[21] He was, in other words, someone who operated from the privileged position necessary to conceptualize the direction of both museological and academic Canadian art history, spheres that have always been overlapping and intertwined in their shaping of the discipline as a whole. To be sure, at a dominant institution such as the National Gallery, this integration of public and intellectual authority had long been achieved through the professionalization of white male figures such as Harper, and the *People's Art* exhibition was no exception to this rule.[22]

When Harper came toward the end of his career and retired from most of his university teaching in the early 1970s, he used this considerable influence to launch the *People's Art* project, a decision that might have been understood as a departure from his previous engagement in the field of Canadian art. Yet as I argue here, "People's Art" can be more productively framed as establishing a linear narrative with regard to cultural production in North America, with a special focus on Canada, as it was known by the European immigrant cultures that had claimed it. Indeed, the postwar economic model of advanced capitalist societies was built on violent imperial expansion into Indigenous territories and dependent on mass production meeting mass consumption in such a way that, as geographer David Harvey puts it, postwar economics appeared more "as a total way of life" than as a capitalist strategy.[23] If the early 1970s capitalist model fundamentally restructured this system and the ways in which national production of any kind could be understood, art and culture was neither immune to the status of the mass commodity nor to the neoliberal challenge to the historical "compromise between capital and labour" that defined advanced postwar capitalist economies in many parts of

the world, including North America.[24] *People's Art* bolstered Harper's ideas about the necessity of integrating the country's regional, ethnic, and linguistic heterogeneity in order to solidify a national sovereignty based on the myth of peaceful European settlement, specifically by searching for the remaining elements of Canada's agrarian past at a time when challenges to this mythology were being increasingly wrought by the post-industrial context in which he was working. Over the course of his research for the exhibition, Harper was teaching in Montreal where, as was powerfully demonstrated in the October Crisis of 1970, a complex political situation produced a very different post-industrial liberal climate in which to consider questions of national identity.[25] The Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped James Cross, a British diplomat, and Pierre Laporte, a Quebec cabinet minister and, on 16 October, the federal government implemented the War Measures Act to quell the resulting violence. Yet here too the post-industrial neoliberal model was in action, since the majority of those arrested by the army were labour activists. As a result, Quebec's most prominent labour unions – the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, and the Corporation des enseignants du Québec – rejected both the FLQ and the federalist cause and called for a political reform outside of these available options.[26]

Harper's challenge, then, was to assemble an exhibition that could easily navigate a complicated political and cultural terrain marked by the unsettling and renegotiation of the liberal hegemony of Canada in the post-industrial period, which he understood in cultural terms. He met this challenge by presenting elite scholarly and museum-going audiences with objects that he described as "keyed to ordinary people who are forthright, uncomplicated – the bulwarks of society."[27] Paradoxical as it was, exhibiting the art production of Canada's European settler-colonial labouring classes to an audience of elite European settler-colonials was a necessary ideological context for defining the "people's art." Furthermore, members of this latter privileged constituency were often the most enthusiastic advocates of Canadian cultural nationalism – even long after such a project could be productively reconciled with the developing transnational economic logic of neoliberalism. If Modernism was "the official art of progressive capitalism" and the industrial era, Harper's task was, above all else, to find a new source of art production that could help him negotiate a period in which neither the postwar victory of Modernist aesthetics nor the commercial character of mass culture could effectively extend the English-Canadian nationalist perspective of the mid-twentieth century into the post-industrial context in Canada.[28] The problem was very much of the moment, though complicated by Harper's inability to find what he was looking for in Canada's contemporary art circles, since the

parameters of what a national culture could look like were already shifting as the economic system of maintaining national sovereignty through liberal capitalist enterprise collapsed. Harper was concerned about the increasingly transnational climate of art production and exchange, aiming his critique at what he called "the back-biting Canadian art world,"[29] which he understood to be the result of escalating external cultural influences on the nationalist domestic content in which he was so invested. And, like many cultural nationalists of his day, he measured this budding threat of transnational neoliberalism on the cultural front in terms of his perceptions about the Americanization of culture in Canada, which he understood both through the lens of elite Modernist art practice and through the facilitated circulation of mass culture across national borders. As he put it in a 1972 letter to Montreal journalist Peter Desbarats:

> Canadian culture matters, particularly in English-speaking Canada, are in a rather bad way simply because the old basic precepts have been so eroded by the fast buck and ballyhoo Americanism that there is not much life which is truly Canadian. Perhaps I should amend it by saying that there isn't much left which I would like to see as what we should really be in this country.[30]

Moreover, Harper lamented the effects of "ideas originating from the canons of New York (that isn't really relevant to Canadian society)" and the influence of "certain taste makers who are little autocrats" on art production in Canada.[31] Certainly, Harper's analysis of U.S. influence on Modernist Canadian art production, which many curators and art historians have read as creating regionalist abstract movements that were "more an outpost of New York than part of the Canadian art scene,"[32] speaks to his desire to help visitors "discover a Canadian ethos through its people's art,"[33] but there is also a broader historical significance to this quest that extends beyond the limited reach of elite art circles.[34]

Specifically, the broader significance of *People's Art* lies in its demonstration of the ways in which many of those invested in the late twentieth-century project of Canadian art history in the 1960s and 1970s – by its very nature, a nationalist endeavour – were also using historical objects of art and culture to negotiate a developing neoliberal context. The negotiation of neoliberalism at this particular juncture speaks to what cultural studies scholar Imre Szeman refers to as "the prehistory of our present moment … and of the idea of the nation more generally in the era of globalization."[35] It is clear, for example, that Harper's *People's Art* exhibition retraced the nationalist context of Canadian art through the historical material remnants

of immigrant European settler-colonial labour rather than through the postmodern art movements with which contemporary artists were starting to engage. Yet given Szeman's arguments, the exhibition can also be read as demonstrating Harper's desire to domesticate cultural production in Canada against the deterritorialization of local, national, and regional cultures under a developing neoliberal context.[36] Therefore, a particular examination of the political-economic rationale for national culture-making during the 1960s and 1970s is essential to a reading of the prehistory of neoliberal globalization through Harper's *People's Art* exhibition. Indeed, despite the fact that domestic production models were disintegrating under the developing neoliberal turn of late capitalism, this was a period in which there was a receptive audience for nationalistic cultural production in Canada.

Discussion of these ideas remained active and fraught in the early to mid-1970s. In her patriotic 1976 tome, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?*, for example, Susan Crean advocated domestic cultural protectionism of the communications and media sectors that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's federal government became known for at this time. As she explained: "In 1967 we awoke to find ourselves celebrating the 100th anniversary of a real country. This country. With money and attention lavished on national festivities as never before, we became aware of Canada as never before. We watched the centennial year unfold, and what we saw was ourselves. For a little while, Canada was visible."[37] Yet, as Szeman suggests, there was also a growing sense that transnational economic policies threatened such nationalism, which fostered a concentrated effort to support not only "culture in Canada" but also "Canadian culture."[38] Under the guise of protecting Canadian "content," Trudeau's federal government enacted policies that developed the understanding that culture was an important resource for the political and economic expediency that nationalism required.[39] Crean cautioned that the focused federal attention on culture necessitated its conscientious management and the development of new infrastructures because culture was a resource like no other: "it is not the kind of resource we are accustomed to thinking of in Canada. Culture in not something that lies buried in the ground beneath the nation's art centres, waiting to be dug up and shipped out in freight cars."[40] Culture, in the context of 1960s and 1970s Canada, was a resource that required management like any other industry. It needed to be managed according to the political-economic rationale of the day – a unified, if "decentralized" and "democratized," liberal, just society in which nationalist cultural production played an important role in the offensive strategy to maintain this hegemonic commonsense, especially considering the ongoing threat to domestic economic sustainability.[41]

The particular challenges of maintaining Canadian cultural nationalism at this time also meant grappling with a domestic political-economic structure that saw the increased internationalization and corporatization of communications media. This first developed in the immediate postwar period and was then extended in the late 1960s and early 1970s in ways that affected the extent to which culture could effectively be pronounced a national product. Technological structures had not been the object of debates over the maintenance of Canadian sovereignty since the railway expansions of the late nineteenth century, even if this time the connections forged in Canadian space were negotiated primarily in cultural terms.[42] The crux of the issue was the extent to which Canadian cultural content could be produced when communications media owned by U.S. corporations were charged with disseminating it, even in Canadian domestic markets. Historian Ryan Edwardson puts it best when he notes that by 1966, the "three institutional pillars upholding the Masseyites' Canadianization – the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, and the Canada Council – were up against the eroding impact of changes benefiting television station owners, periodical publishers, and feature filmmakers; identifying Canadian content in terms of high-cultural experience, something quite hard to measure, was being overshadowed by a bureaucratic preference for quantitative assessments of Canadianess."[43] This reality was particularly significant for Harper's *People's Art* project, for it helped him to demonstrate how the transnational corporatization of Canadian content shaped the reading of art as a domestic product. It was, to be sure, less a question of artists training in such centres of Modernist excellence as New York and Paris that affected their ability to produce Canadian art – for this had been done for decades – than it was the manner in which federal cultural organizations could resist the denationalization of cultural industries on behalf of Canadian cultural producers on the whole. Making an ongoing nationalist claim to culture through the search for a "people's art" appealed to Harper because he saw it as being able to withstand both U.S. American elite art (and its Canadian imitators) and the forces of mass culture that were located in transnational corporations that often had a U.S. base. In fact, Harper saw so-called naïve cultural producers as operating outside both the regulating structures of the art world and of the commercial and corporate cultural melee and therefore unaffected by these threats to erode Canada's national character.

As a result, when Harper began conceptualizing the *People's Art* project, that moment was shaped by the inability of dominant Canadian culture makers to successfully frame artistic endeavours in nationalist terms.

Defending Canadian culture against an increasingly privatized transnational cultural system was particularly difficult because the production and circulation of cultural forms were affected at all levels of conventional classification – elite, popular, mass, and everything in between. Harper spent most of his career working in elite art circles and in that milieu, concerns about the U.S. influence on artistic expression remained at the forefront throughout the period in which he researched the exhibition. However, perhaps his turn to popular cultural production during the 1970s does make sense when properly contextualized. In a letter written in 1972, Harper deplored the internationalization and industrialization of the culture industries because of their effects on the people of Canada as a whole who, Harper feared, were becoming disconnected from their shared national history, and particularly, on professional contemporary artists in Canada who, unlike a "naïve" producer ignorant of artworld mechanisms, seemed unable to resist the foray of transnational influences that threatened the nationalist core of Canadian art at this time.[44] "Art," Harper reminded Desbarats, "was surely created for the enjoyment and enrichment of the lives of people – hence the book which I am now writing on the vernacular in Canadian art, art of the people. But I must not get started on a sermon."[45] Outlining such concerns in the monograph that accompanied the *People's Art* exhibition and its catalogue, Harper noted that, under current conditions, "new domination by mass media from many outside sources, multinational corporations, and omnipresent mercenary standards threatens individuality. Self-assertion is difficult. But it is possible, as the paintings in this book remind us. We are as diverse as our provincial flowers, yet all of these can be united in a colourful 'bush garden.' If we sympathetically open our minds, these diverse parts can be blended into a strong and real Canada."[46] Harper steadfastly maintained the combination of two elements in the *People's Art* exhibition: his assertion that naïve artists could withstand the mass cultural influences that he saw rooted in U.S. imperialism and his contention that the context of transnational cultural exchange had muddied the waters of elite art production in Canada in particular. In his determination to identify objects that would satisfy his premise, Harper assembled works that spoke to the "social and cultural panorama of ordinary men,"[47] drawn from those whom he characterized as "discriminating collectors of primitives from Halifax to Victoria."[48] He provided his audience with what he framed as "a kind of 'other look' at art in Canada,"[49] one that served as a reminder that "mass media and external economic pressures are fast negating much of [Canada's] feeling of unity."[50] This reality, Harper insisted, meant that it was "imperative that the art which emerges from the soul of the land be examined now."[51] Nationalist cultural producers such as Harper believed that, when properly selected and disseminated, art could provide a nation in the process of forgetting with a

reminder of its history as an immigrant European agrarian society that pulled itself up by the bootstraps into postwar industrialism.

The Modernist-Primitivist Model, "Regional" Expertise, and the Post-industrial Present

If Harper's understanding of the "people's art" was a search for Canada's European agrarian settler past against the realities of post-industrial technological neoliberalism, it was also equally informed by the historical discourse of modernist-primitivism that had roots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial capitalism.[52] This discourse, as literary scholar Victor Li points out, sought to advance ideas about people "belonging to authentic, primordial cultures yet untouched or uncontaminated by modernity," which could "no longer be called upon to act as pure forms of otherness" in the post-industrial, postmodern context.[53] To make this argument Harper sought out the primordial folk past that his experience in the post-industrial present negated, and he did so by poring over the conceptual and material dimensions of folklore. Harper played with a multitude of terms in order to describe the material heritage of the Canadian ethos, using such words as "primitive," "naïve," "provincial," and "folk" to specify what he was in search of. In 1969, Harper began scouring the country for artworks that he initially described as "primitives,"[54] to see "if I could not find enough provincial and primitive Canadian painting to make a companion volume to a book, 'Painting in Canada'." He recalled, "I was never completely happy with that work because so much of the art seemed based on European and American tradition – and I would like to captivate more completely the Canadian flavour."[55] As I have argued, Harper's search for what he came to call "the Canadian vernacular" was a mission with important nationalist undertones, one that required bringing regional cultural production into the fold of a national cultural institution in order to validate it. "Being a good Canadian," he wrote in 1970, "I think we can do just as well here as the Americans have done in the Rockefeller Collection at Williamsburg, and in other places. We are simply too modest to toot our own horns."[56] He solidified this sentiment a year later, by arguing that, "It's time we sounded the horn a bit more on things Canadian. This is what I hope the book on primitives will do. We can do just as well in this country as the Americans have done on their so-called 'Folk' art that they have been vaunting for the last forty years."[57] Although he eventually abandoned the term "primitive," Harper's search for a "people's art" was certainly imbued with what Li calls "a deep primitivist logic" that allowed the term to be revived in the post-industrial context "under such acceptable or neutral names as 'alterity,' 'culture,' and 'modernity.'"[58] Harper was, in other words,

compelled to define a Canadian vernacular in such a way that it came to stand in for Canadian culture as a whole: the European settler society in its purest and most authentic form.

Harper was faced with the challenge of finding a way to combine the diversity of regional cultural forms that spoke to the settled past under one national umbrella in order to solidify his vision in the present. He also needed to locate a terminology that would effectively describe the material remnants of the "people's art." One way to accomplish this was to examine the character of regional culture itself and to suggest that its various incarnations across Canada could be united under the notion of a national "vernacular," a cultural language that somehow all Canadians should be able to understand. "In speech," he explained, "regional expressions are termed a vernacular. It seems equally appropriate to speak of the 'vernacular' in connection with an art that reflects local ways of life. Paintings from a particular region of Canada find much of their appeal in qualities as distinctive as the local dialect in speech."[59] Harper clearly understood the "region" as a site of rural cultural production outside of central Canadian cities, arguing that "those from the Atlantic seaboard … seem as regional as the phrases and soft accents of Maritimers which varied from county to county until radio and television imposed a dull uniformity. If his dialect differentiates a Nova Scotian from a Newfoundlander, with his lilt a sea 'argot,' or from a prairie rancher whose tales are peppered with the expressions of ranching days," Harper insisted, "so do his local paintings."[60] Harper's argument that national communications networks were levelling out regional diversity subtly contradicts his desire to critique the "mass media and external economic pressures"[61] that undermined Canadian national unity. Herein lies the twisted logic of the *People's Art*: the project illustrates the National Gallery's historical pattern of capitalizing on the activities of provincial cultural institutions in its ongoing quest to determine the nature and direction of Canadian art as a nationalist enterprise, while suppressing regional cultural expressions that suggest alternative narratives.[62] The irony of Harper's framing of these "regions" is that his central Canadian authority relied on precisely those supposedly marginal sites of influence to reproduce his vision of a national vernacular. This illustrates the slippage that occurs between such categories when one defines a "regional" expression according to a nationalizing logic; if Harper used this exhibition "to demonstrate an underlying national spirit in historic terms,"[63] he did so by relying extensively on the knowledge of museum professionals working outside of dominant institutions in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. It was, in the end, this so-called regional expertise that determined most of the objects that made up what Harper articulated as a national exhibition, which also provided an untapped reserve to effectively illustrate Canadian culture.

Harper understood his role as identifying and bringing wider recognition to popular art and nationalizing regional artistic expression by presenting it at Canada's most authoritative cultural institution. As he explained to National Gallery director Jean Sutherland Boggs during the planning stages of the exhibition in 1971, "I feel that I should probably make a trip to both the east and west coast to assure some kind of national coverage, but concentrating most of my travelling to shorter trips in Ontario and Quebec. I think I should visit a number of smaller Ontario museums, etc., which normally don't attract attention." He then seemed to reconsider his request: "Actually, I went on my own to the Maritimes last summer, and I might be able to by-pass that. I do want to get in touch with people in Newfoundland."[64] Having worked in Saint John and Fredericton for most of the 1950s, Harper relied on his existing network of contacts at Atlantic Canadian museum and heritage sites to assess available material, writing in 1970 to John Lynn of the Fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, "I am anxious to include representative work from all parts of Canada and I don't like to be accused of forgetting the Maritimes."[65] To Peter Bell at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, Harper explained, "one of the National Gallery's stipulations is that I should go from coast to coast in my search."[66] To cover all of his bases, Harper also contacted two of the leading "Atlantic Realist"[67] painters of his day, Alex Colville (1920–2013), then in Sackville, New Brunswick, and Christopher Pratt (b. 1935), in St. Catherine's, Newfoundland, in search of "odd things tucked away on the east coast" that might have inspired their own work.[68] In conducting this search, Harper depended on the knowledge of local experts to isolate suitable works for consideration in the exhibition before travelling outside of central Canada to evaluate the objects in person. For instance, in 1971, he told Moncrieff Williamson of the Confederation Art Gallery that: "The situation is that I would love to go over to Charlottetown, but time and money are limited and I don't want to come unless I feel I might have some hope of discoveries."[69] Harper thereby delegated much of the selection process to regional professionals who were geographically closer to what he envisioned as the rural sites of "naïve" art production. Such a system required Harper to provide a detailed explanation of what precisely constituted the "people's art." "My biggest difficulty," Harper later explained to Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature curator James Stanton, "is to describe to people just what I am looking for, but it is art with character and quality but in the non-grand manner tradition of Europe and with what some people describe as a folk or naïve character. Incidentally these terms are ones with several definitions."[70]

By 1972, Harper confirmed that, given the vast geographical realities of the project, the "search for the Canadian ethos is not a simple matter."[71] He had by that time followed up on several leads from private collectors

and local museums, guiding him to travel to Saint John, New Brunswick, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, and up and down the Quebec-Windsor corridor. Such trips demonstrated the difficulty of the task at hand, as he articulated later in the *People's Art* monograph: "The fruitlands of Niagara bear no visible relationship to the bleak Arctic or the British Columbia rain forests. Fishermen from Newfoundland outports are virtual foreigners to workers in prairie grain elevators. A real unity of thought and outlook seems impossible for Canada because of its sheer size; Vancouver Island is as remote spiritually as it is physically from Cape Race."[72]

Equally complex as the nationalization of regional cultural production, though, was Harper's constant negotiation to find the appropriate language to express what he called the "material achievements" of the objects he was assembling.[73] In his correspondence with provincial museums, Harper tended to use the word "primitive," although he was also quick to stipulate that it was "a term I don't quite agree with but [one] used much by Americans for those in the famous Rockefeller Collection."[74] He articulated his need to come up with a suitable definition to Boggs in 1971. Noting that she had suggested *Primitive Images in Canada* as a title for the exhibition, he explained, "My idea had been to confine the book to purely pictorial material, but to include provincial, naïve and folk art. The question of definitions of various terms comes up. I assume that we are agreed that it should be an exhibition of 'unsophisticated art' rather than sticking to any academic interpretation of 'primitive.'"[75] He shared this correspondence with Francess Halpenny, his editor at the University of Toronto Press: "As you will note in my letter to Jean Boggs, while she has suggested a title *Primitive Images in Canada*, I am a little concerned that it is not quite wide enough. I had thought of some such title as *The Unsophisticated Look*, or *The Unsophisticated Painting*, with a sub-title of *Canadian, Folk and Naïve Art*. The difficulty is to get around the terminology."[76] In 1972, he further expressed his frustration with taxonomy to Boggs, lamenting, "the critical point as to when a painting turns from a really 'provincial and popular' aspect to 'high art' has bothered me greatly."[77] That same year, he wrote to the National Gallery's curator of Canadian art, Pierre Théberge, that "deciding what should really be in this exhibition has been a most difficult problem."[78]

The Folk Art Category and the National Gallery of Canada

Luckily, previous National Gallery exhibitions that had sought Canada's European agrarian folk heritage in its regional art production provided Harper with established models to draw upon in his ideological conception and material representation of the "people's art." In his appreciation of known

"primitive paintings from the prairies, particularly those of [Jan G.] Wyers and [William] Panko,"[79] Harper drew specifically on Norah McCullough's 1959 National Gallery exhibition *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*.[80] According to Harper, this exhibition "pioneered for the region" in terms of identifying viable folk artists from the Western Provinces who could locate a particular vision of rural Canada and showcase the agrarian negotiation of industrial expansion for an urban audience in Canada's capital city.[81] What is more, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* also exposed the tensions in the categorization of "folk" cultural production at the National Gallery and the ways in which this term was embedded with the same modernist-primitivist discourse as Harper's exhibition, albeit this time with living artists whose work could be used to prove the resilience of folk societies despite modern industrial expansion. McCullough, who was at the time the National Gallery's liaison officer for Western Canada,[82] launched her exhibition through the Gallery's Department of Extension Services, which was dedicated to expanding the institution's sphere of influence by offering artwork loans and bringing exhibitions to provincial museums outside of Ontario. Former director Eric Brown had activated the national loans and extension programs in 1916 as part of his "chief ambition … to bring the National Gallery to every part of Canada."[83] Yet, as McCullough's exhibition demonstrated, rather than "extending" any long-term decentralized regional authority to these museums, the programs run out of Extension Services had the effect of nationalizing cultural producers formerly outside of the National Gallery's immediate reach. Chief among the formerly excluded, according to McCullough, were artists who she described as "not professional painters – that is, those who painted for the love of it and who were not trained at art schools."[84] These included Wyers and Panko, who Harper would later see as central figures in defining folk art of the Canadian prairies. "These people," McCullough wrote to Maxwell Bates in 1959, "… are not 'primitive.' They seem always to have been with us going back fairly obviously, to the medieval workers who delighted in birds, beasties, leaves and flowers. The simplicity and honesty is refreshing."[85] Bates, a well-known professionally-trained artist and writer based in Calgary, replied to McCullough that he had, "off and on for some time … been writing an article on Folk Artists. I think this name you have chosen is much better than Primitive, or Modern Primitive, and I shall use it in the future."[86] More than a simple relabeling, the shifting of this categorization from "primitive" to "folk" had important aesthetic and socio-cultural implications for the *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* exhibition in terms of reinscribing a primitivist logic under expanded conceptual guises. In particular, McCullough's objective was to organize the "Folk Painters" exhibition around works that demonstrated "one of the

principle characteristics of the folk painter," which she described as "excessive productivity, a curious and urgent compulsion."[87] More importantly, however, McCullough framed the exhibition in racialized terms, by presenting the artists she chose as a type of European immigrant *volk* who brought their primordial customs with them to Canada.

This distinction between the "primitive" and the "folk" categories is important and it helps to demonstrate two things about McCullough's employment of "folk" terminology. To begin with, as art historian Leslie Dawn argues, there is a longer history in English-speaking Canada in which, during the early twentieth century, British settler-colonial inhabitants did not think of themselves as having "an ancient *volk* who they could cite as ancestors, thereby legitimizing their entitlements to [Dominion] territories by continuous occupation."[88] Further, Dawn suggests that, "recognizing the 'Indians' as the nation's *volk* at this time would have validated their rights to their disputed territories and obviated the need to destroy their traditions. The alternative, then, was either to exclude them from the emerging emblems of nation or to place their cultures irretrievably in the past … They were certainly not presented as Canada's *volk*."[89] This was precisely the position that such early twentieth-century folklore enthusiasts as National Museum of Canada ethnologist Marius Barbeau took when it came to applying modernist-primitivist discourse to Indigenous and settler-colonial cultural production, most notably in his 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern*, which placed the paintings of the Group of Seven and Emily Carr alongside Nisga'a headdresses, Tlingit Chilkat robes, and models of Haida totem poles at the National Gallery.[90] As art historian Lynda Jessup points out, director Brown touted the exhibition as the first to position Northwest Coast Indigenous cultural production as "artistic first and ethnological after."[91] In the accompanying catalogue, Brown wrote that the exhibition's purpose was "to mingle for the first time the art work of the Canadian West Coast tribes with that of our more sophisticated artists in an endeavour to analyze their relationship to one another, if such exists, and particularly to enable this primitive and interesting art to take a definite place as one of the most valuable of Canada's artistic productions."[92] The result was to present paintings by Carr and members of the Group of Seven as Modernist masterworks, with the Indigenous material culture positioned relationally as both aesthetically and socially "primitive" by way of its perpetual location in the past.[93] Barbeau's simultaneous promotion of folk "soirées" in Montreal in the 1920s, which brought rural Québécois folklore and material culture to elite urban audiences, applied with scholarly authority a notion of primitivism that had formerly been reserved for Indigenous societies in North American anthropological circles to European settler-colonial traditions.[94] Yet all of

this only exposed the malleability of the primitivist logic, even if, as Dawn puts it, "the Native and the native were not to be easily reconciled" at the National Gallery in terms of maintaining distinct ideas about Indigenous and European settler-colonial primitivism.[95] Harper writes of the trajectory of negotiating the primitive category amongst Indigenous and European settler-colonial producers alike, noting, "A few individual Canadian collectors have long been sympathetic to our primitives. Marius Barbeau, [U.S. artist] Patrick Morgan, and [painter, filmmaker, and art historian] Jean Palardy have been pioneer promoters of the more contemporary phases, giving encouragement to the folk painters of Charlevoix County in Quebec during the 1930s."[96] While the Indigenous could still be located within the primitive past and framed as an "exotic" remnant of a colonial enterprise, different language was required when it came to providing the justificatory evidence of a primordial folk culture in Canada; this distinction would provide the added bonus of entrenching European settler-colonial claims to Indigenous lands.

Although McCullough was working within the same modernist-primitivist paradigm as such prominent figures as Barbeau, she used this model to make the claim for a European immigrant *volk* in Canada. Specifically, McCullough based her inquiry into folk culture on the racialized categories established by John Murray Gibbon, who popularized the term "Canadian Mosaic" in 1938.[97] Much like Harper's articulation of popular art in the 1970s, a context marked by using multiculturalism as official state policy to address increasing settler diversity,[98] Gibbon was especially concerned with the growing industrialization of Canada under interwar modernity in the 1920s and 1930s, which he feared would create increased isolation as the country's diverse European immigrant groups failed to interrelate with one another.[99] More than this, Gibbon saw the concept of the mosaic (and how such "folk" fit into it) as politically astute, since it could help to subvert the appeal of socialism or other forms of labour unrest. The mosaic, then, did not just build national unity; it also undercut political ideas that might challenge a liberal commonsense.[100] Gibbon's solution to such problems, as it would be later for McCullough and Harper, was to help Canada reclaim some of its agrarian roots through the promotion of so-called folk culture. As historian Stuart Henderson puts it, Gibbon's solution relied on "an immutable background of white Anglo-Celt (male) hegemony onto which he could manufacture his mosaic."[101] Connecting her search for folk art directly to her understanding of Indigenous primitivism, McCullough framed each context in ways that were equally allochronistic.[102] "It may be that the folk painter in North America will soon disappear for good," McCullough concluded in the catalogue, "or like a bird lost in migration will be found only in more remote parts of the country from time to time."[103] This is certainly the concept of the

folk artist that Harper would draw upon in *People's Art*, reminding his readers that "Canada until recently was a rural society and it is in rural society that vernacular art has always found its deepest roots."[104]

Building her case for an immigrant European *volk* in Canada made McCullough eager to contextualize the "folk" painting of ethnic communities within the larger Euro-North American perspective. In 1959, she wrote to National Gallery's librarian, Christa Deddering, requesting, "all the data you have" on "folk painting." She continued, "It is curious but so far I am finding that this kind of painting – apart from Grandma Moses – seems to be a masculine prerogative … Also, are there any psychological references to painting compulsions by *retired* persons, not necessarily aberrated? Of course [French "naïve" painter Henri] Rousseau is the most outstanding example and from the French film about him, it does seem that there are very definite psychological factors although these need not necessarily be pathological, unless one accepts that as the basis for all creative output!"[105] Although she felt compelled to isolate folk art as a separate field of ethnic cultural production, McCullough clearly understood the broader context of establishing the so-called "folk" or "naïve" artist as one derivative of the "primitive" category. Once again, McCullough conducted careful research on the use of the term "folk art" in international art circles. She wrote to Louise Dresser of the Worchester Art Museum in Massachusetts later that same year: "I find Jean Lipman has expressed herself very well on the subject [of folk art] … Can you tell me … if you think she is the kind of person to who [sic] I could write requesting her permission to paraphrase her definition of folk art?" In the same letter, McCullough noted that she was also impressed by "a summary, in a copy of *Studio* written by Alice Ford, of a symposium on Folk Art. She must be an American, as she refers to 'our' arts – such a nice, light touch this piece has – and I would like to send an inquiry to her too."[106]

In turning to Lipman's *American Primitive Painting*, published by Oxford University Press in 1942, McCullough recognized the interrelation between Modernist painters and the so-called folk artists they valued. As Lipman put it, "it seems worth noting here that such outstanding modern artists as Robert Laurent, William Zorach, Stephan Hirsh, Alexander Brook, Elie Nadelman, and Charles Sheeler were among the first to recognize the quality of the American Primitives and have gained inspiration from collecting them. Our generation values abstract quality above all else."[107] With this statement, Lipman articulated one of the foundational ideas of the modern folk art construct, which demonstrated that, "for the first time in history … [produced] a deliberately abstract art," leading art historians to value the work of untrained artists "formerly described as crude, uncouth, stiff, distorted, [and] poorly executed … That the same objects are now described

as original, individual, formalized, lucid, abstract," Lipman continued, "merely implies a shift in the attitude of the critic, who has come to value abstract above illusionistic representation and to evaluate primitive art positively rather than negatively."[108] Crucially, Lipman concluded, "abstract design is the heart and soul of the American Primitive, and it is this fact which has won for it the acclaim of the moderns."[109] Alice Ford's 1951 article "What is American Folk Art?" in *Studio*, in turn, summarized thirteen typical definitions of the form, all of which demonstrated the ways in which "[in] our own culture, we are, and always have been, mesmerized by European aestheticism." In other words, Ford argued that regardless of the aesthetic qualities of the work, typical definitions of folk art in the U.S. tended to emphasize the European roots of its artists, as "New England, the Atlantic seaboard and adjacent Pennsylvania are jealously guarded as the only American folk culture reality."[110]

After conducting her research into these sources, McCullough wrote to the National Gallery's director of Extension and Exhibition Services, Richard Simmins, to enlist the assistance of an expert in the field, someone who could speak to the international qualities of the form. "Could we not ask [U.S. American Modernist painter] Max Weber to write a few words on the primitive or folk artist for the preface to the catalogue," she asked Simmins, "on the basis of his friendship and sympathy for Rousseau? It would give the whole thing a tremendous lift."[111] Despite McCullough's view that Weber would be an appropriate choice, given her understanding of an international folk art field, Simmins did not agree, "I do not think we should ask Max Weber to do a forward [sic] to the catalogue as I would like it to be a Canadian production from start to finish. I am going to ask you to be responsible for the text and perhaps I will ask Alan Jarvis [then National Gallery director] to contribute the forward [sic]."[112] As it turned out, Jarvis helped to frame *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* in less broadly internationalist terms than McCullough had perhaps envisioned. For example, rather than positioning the group of painters McCullough selected as being identifiable within an international folk art field and an immigrant European *volk* tradition, Jarvis simply noted that their art was "rarely exhibited, and then only locally" and belonged to no "stream of tradition … although they do seem to have much in common with the recognized folk painters of Europe, past and present."[113] Jarvis's comments in the foreword suggested that the artists represented in *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* were known only in their regional communities, with little connection to identifiable artistic circles, European or otherwise. In fact, of the six painters represented in the exhibition – Sydney H. Barker (1893–1970), Eugene W. Dahlstrom (1885–1971), Roland Keevil (1884–1963), William Panko (1892–1948), W.N. Stewart (1888–?), and Jan

G. Wyers (1888–1973) – only two, Barker and Stewart, were born in Canada. The remaining four were European-born, Dahlstron in Sweden, Keevil in England, Panko in Austria, and Wyers in Holland. In her catalogue essay, McCullough examined these painters in the context of "the medieval artist-craftsmen of Europe" and "the early American folk artist," noting that, "this group of six artists have [sic] not emerged from a well-established colonial society. Their origins are close to Europe, for only two are Canadian-born, and they have come together in this exhibition by accident."[114] With this, McCullough bolstered her assertion "that the folk-painter continues to exist throughout western cultures, to emerge again and again as he has in England, in France, Switzerland, Sweden or here in Canada."[115]

Much like McCullough before him, Harper debated how to define precisely the European settler-colonial vernacular tradition of the "people's art," and he was working at a time when many ideas about what constituted popular art forms were becoming increasingly institutionalized. In 1972, Harper wrote a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau explaining the significance of the *People's Art* project for contemporary society: "It seems an appropriate moment for the book and exhibition at a time when over-intellectualism in art has isolated much painting from the masses and when technocracy tries to remove the warmth of humanity from daily life."[116] Again, Harper conceived of such threats in nationalist terms, insisting that he was "very pro-Canadian these days," because of the U.S. influence on Canadian cultural matters. "I was slightly incensed to see that the recent Royal Ontario Museum publication on Canadian pottery was honoured with a foreword with a few patronizing words from a Smithsonian curator," he complained in 1971. "Are we so emasculated that we have no Canadians left capable of saying anything about our own cultural heritage?"[117] Locating the vernacular roots of an increasingly post-industrial society, however, was one of Harper's primary challenges in bringing such categories as the "folk" and the "primitive" into relief against the emerging neoliberal capitalist context of the early 1970s. Always open to reinterpretation and renegotiation to take account of the particular realities of modernization at a given historical moment, the "primitives" and "folk" of Harper's day were also tempered within a societal context defined by bi- and multicultural state policy in Canada. Beginning in the 1960s, the federal government reinvigorated Gibbon's mosaic metaphor in the official policy on bilingualism and biculturalism and in the extension of separate legal rights to Indigenous people (officially classified as Indians, Inuit, and Métis).[118] Moreover, the postwar era saw what sociologist Richard J.F. Day describes as "increasing intervention of the Canadian state in providing solutions to the problem of Canadian diversity, primarily by taking on the task of what it now called 'integration' of citizens."[119] Unlike the 1940s,

however, when "Canadian identity was taken up by the Canadian state as a solution to the wartime problem of European Immigrant diversity,"[120] the Canadian federal state of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw integration as necessary to quell Québécois nationalism, to cope with the arrival of non-European immigrants, and to assimilate Indigenous populations who were then increasingly resisting colonialist claims to ancestral lands.[121] In a federal state concerned with the problem of non-European diversity, Harper's search for a "primitive" or "folk" heritage in Canada had particular implications when it came to using these terms to establish what a national vernacular could mean. Certainly, there were limits to Harper's desire for integration into the "strong and real Canada," which meant rethinking the available categories of the "primitive," the "naïve," the "provincial," and the "folk" according to Eurocentric notions of a national past tied to the colonial settling and working of the land – even if, in the post-industrial era, there were few agrarian labourers of European descent left in Canada.[122]

The Aesthetics of Agrarian Labour under Late Capitalism

By the time he published the *People's Art* exhibition catalogue (1973) and his monograph *A People's Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada* (1974), Harper had completed his categorical negotiations and solidified his terminology, using words such as "primitive," "naïve," "provincial," and "folk" and taking pains to provide definitions of these terms. "'Primitives'," he insisted, "are done by artists who lack the technical knowledge of the trained painter but overcome their handicap by sheer will power." A "naïve" artist, in turn, Harper defined as "really the humblest of the primitives. To my mind the difference is simply a matter of degree of proficiency in execution."[123] Unlike the primitive and naïve artists, who "may well know nothing about the rules of perspectives laid down for the classical artist," Harper noted that, "provincial canvases receive stylistic inspiration from a centre elsewhere, be it London, Paris, or New York …. Where, however, is the border between what is truly 'primitive' and what is sufficiently skilled to be 'provincial'? Go one step further and you will find it difficult to determine when the 'provincial' ceases and the 'classical' begins."[124] Folk art, Harper argued, "in contrast to the other three subdivisions, usually has an ethnic character … Some writers have described the paintings of Wyers, Panko, and the artists of Charlevoix County as 'folk' art; using the definitions being developed here they would be classified as 'primitive.'"[125] Possibly, Harper's understanding of these artists as "primitive" rather than "folk" was tied to the overall argument in both the catalogue and monograph, which delineates a retreat from agrarian lifestyles to urbanization across the

1 | Jan Wyers, *My Home in Holland*, n.d., oil on canvas, 40.8 x 64.3 cm, Coll. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON. (Photo: National Gallery of Canada)

country. According to this line of thinking, the ethnic farming communities across the Canadian prairies, which McCullough described in 1959, had perhaps all but evaporated by the 1970s. A case in point is the isolation of Panko's and Wyers's paintings in both *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* and *People's Art*. In her exhibition catalogue, McCullough provided a short interview with Wyers in which he states, "I have a quarter section of land and go out to the farm as soon as spring comes. I feel better out there."[126] The three Wyers canvasses that McCullough selected for reproduction in the catalogue cast a trajectory from Wyers's Dutch roots to his life on Saskatchewan farmlands. Specifically, McCullough juxtaposed Wyers's 1930s work *My Home in Holland* (Fig. 1), which depicts an image of Wyers's childhood home which he had painted from a photograph,[127] with two scenes of prairie farm life, *The First Saskatchewan Harvest* and *These Good Old Threshing Days* (Fig. 2), thus marking a passage into his life of agrarian – if mechanized – labour in rural Saskatchewan. Harper described the artist as "a Dutch-born farmer," who "painted scenes depicting many aspects of his life on the farm," and selected two Wyers paintings, *These Good Old Threshing Days* and *Quitting Time* (Fig. 3) for *People's Art*. Read together, these paintings

2 | Jan Wyers, *These Good Old Threshing Days*, ca. 1955, oil on fabric, 71.1 x 99.1 cm, Coll. MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK. (Photo: MacKenzie Art Gallery)

3 | Jan Wyers, *Quitting Time*, n.d., oil on fabric, 59.7 x 74.9 cm, Coll. Neil Devitt, Winnipeg, MB. (Photo: courtesy of the MacKenzie Art Gallery)

4 | William Panko, *Birds in a Garden/Blue Birds of Happiness*, ca. 1940, watercolour, 31.8 x 33.7 cm, Coll. Moira Swinton, Winnipeg, MB. (Photo: Ernest Mayer)

map a day of working in the field, which Harper recounted as "the farmer's paen [sic] of thanksgiving to nature which provides for all."[128] Panko, in turn, emerged in McCullough's exhibition as an Austrian immigrant who "worked as a farmer in summer and each winter in the Alberta mines at Drumheller until stricken with tuberculosis of the hip in 1937."[129] As Harper explained, Panko then "recalled those idyllic earlier days in his paintings."[130] Panko's 1940 watercolour *Birds in a Garden* (Fig. 4) was included in both exhibitions but Harper titled it *Blue Birds of Happiness*, and the *People's Art* catalogue also illustrated Panko's industrial work in *Drumheller, Alberta*. "The town of Drumheller is pictured at the peak of prosperity," Harper wrote of the latter

Panko painting, which depicts a bustling industrial town with coal mines, grain elevators, trains, and postwar workers' housing: "The artist was one of them."[131]

Despite Harper's attempt to establish temporal distance between these coeval representations of European settler-colonial agrarian labour and late capitalism, it was the contemporary nature of these works that marked their status as "primitive." Harper explained this contradiction as the result of an ongoing "spontaneous phenomenon," whose "spirit appears and vanished like the will-o'-the-wisp … But this approach brings a fresh and stimulating breadth into a contemporary society preoccupied with the grand tradition and with fashion."[132] This sentiment is in line with an interview he gave Virginia Nixon of the Montreal *Gazette* in 1975, in which he expressed "nostalgia for things I find are lacking in contemporary society, which is rather hard and matter-of-fact."[133] As Nixon noted, Harper "contrasted today's 'egocentric' approach with the picture of the patriarch trying to build something for his community."[134] Once again, Harper turned to his search for the "people's art" to contrast what he saw as the ills of post-industrial society. "For instance," he offered Nixon, "19th-century Ontario farmers sometimes painted or commissioned portraits of prize livestock to hang in their dining rooms. It gives such a sense of 'I raised those sheep – look what I did' as opposed to the man who works on an assembly line at General Motors."[135] Along these same lines, Harper closed both the *People's Art* exhibition and its accompanying publications by offering what he posited as a concrete example of this transition from agrarian to industrial life. The juxtaposition of two canvasses by Chicoutimi-based artist Arthur Villeneuve (1910–1990), his *The Carnival Dance* (1971) and *The Nightmare of Civilization* (1967) visually expressed what Harper poetically referred to in the *People's Art* monograph as a "creative vernacular spirit" that was "not quite dead" in the present.[136] Harper described the first painting as Villeneuve's depiction of the "Carnival of the End of the World," which is "held annually in Chicoutimi, Quebec, during the week preceding Ash Wednesday. The mayor proclaims that all should celebrate."[137] Harper argued that, in contrast to "the creation of the festive mood we see in [*The Carnival Dance*]," in *The Nightmare of Civilization* Villeneuve "gives expression to the troubling complexities of the contemporary world."[138] For Harper, Villeneuve's *The Nightmare of Civilization* is an act of protest, a canvas that shows "man exhausted by the modern world: a present-day Adam, stripped of even the affectation of clothing, is left prostrate and shivering after the bombardment. Impersonal robot-like life patterns cannot be ignored," Harper warned, "they infect our culture. Yet it is possible in the 1970s to look to uncomplicated vernacular in the search for that personal and direct relationship with life desired by

Villeneuve and others."[139] The canvas, which depicts stylized monstrous characters swirling around an abstract male figure, certainly communicates a feeling of chaos. Ultimately, Harper's *People's Art* exhibition suggested that the Canadian vernacular was the key tool with which to navigate the chaos of the post-industrial era in particular, marked as it was by increased challenges to Canadian cultural life. Given this context, it is not surprising that Harper and many of his nationalist contemporaries found themselves doing battle with cultural homogenization, particularly when one considers the pace of postwar North American modernization and the extended circumstances of its subsequent demise. As Harper reminded his readers, "Young and old, in an attempt to escape from present-day impersonality, seek out furniture of past years to surround themselves with the quiet aura of former times. Through the land, city dwellers seek new homes in the countryside."[140] In the end, Harper's longing for this aura ensured that "isolating 'Canadianism' is most difficult" in the present, forcing one to look beyond the "outside forces [that] have erected internal psychological barriers which work against unified national feeling."[141] Harper's search for a unified Canadian vernacular was one that ended up being as ephemeral as the project of Canada itself, leaving the "people's art" as an idea that only dominant cultural nationalists would continue to seek out and claim.

NOTES

This article has been improved by several conversations and readings. My sincere thanks go to Martha Langford and to the anonymous readers from the *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* for their helpful feedback, critiques, and editorial suggestions. I am also grateful to Mark A. Cheetham, Dia Da Costa, and Andrew Nurse for reading drafts of this paper at various stages. This material is drawn from my larger research project, entitled "Bordering the Vernacular: Canada and the Institutional Search for the Settled Past," which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Harrison McCain Foundation Young Scholar Award, and the University Research Fund at the University of New Brunswick.

1 The final book-length study of J. Russell Harper's career was his monograph, *Kreighoff* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

2 For an analysis of the distinction between the terms "settler," "colonial," and "settler-colonial," see Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation," *Borderlands* 6:2 (2007). Accessed 7 July 2011, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol6no2_2007/veracini_settler.htm; Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Anna Johnson and

Alan Lawson, "Settler Colonies," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies,* ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 360–76.

3 "Canadian Homespun: Primitive, Folk and Provincial Painting," Manuscripts, Working Drafts, n.d., Library and Archives Canada, J. Russell Harper fonds, MG 30 D 352, volume 44, file 17. Unless otherwise noted, all quoted correspondence can be found at Library and Archives Canada, J. Russell Harper fonds, MG 30 D 352, volume 44.

4 Harper wrote two books to accompany the "People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada" exhibition. The first was an exhibition catalogue published by the National Gallery of Canada in 1973, entitled *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, which contains a short introductory essay by Harper along with a catalogue raisonné of the works in the exhibition. The second was a monograph entitled *A People's Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada* and published by the University of Toronto Press in 1974. The monograph is a more extensive scholarly introduction to the subject of primitive, naïve, folk, and provincial art in Canada and nine short essays group the exhibition's works thematically as follows: The First Canadians; Honour Thy God; For King and Country; The Placid Countryside; The People of the Land; The Rising Towns and Villages; Of Ships and the Sea; The Sporting Life; and Some Leisure Hours.

5 Geographer David Harvey is among those who has written most extensively on the Fordist phase (1950–73) of capitalism, a period of productivity in which the myth of labouring classes sharing the benefits of accumulated profits with those who controlled the means of production emerged. He also articulates the subsequent post-1973 (post-Fordist, post-industrialist) neoliberal rationale of free trade as a solution to managing the gross accumulation of postwar capital. This model has actually resulted in the dispossession of workers from their sources of employment in order to ensure that their surplus labour could be extracted and exploited. He refers to this secondary phase, which began in 1973, not simply as an era of "post-Fordism" but also as one of "flexible accumulation" in which the dimensions of time and space are shrinking as communications and information technologies allow for changes in the production and accumulation models of capital and labour. See especially David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006). For an especially good synopsis of the crisis of Fordism and the emergence of the post-Fordist economy, which synthesizes many of Harvey's arguments, see also Fran Tonkiss, *Contemporary Economic Sociology: Globalisation, Production, Inequality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 87–104.

6 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10–11.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 75.

9 Ibid.

10 David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 123.

11 As Harvey argues, 1973 was a significant year in neoliberal state formation, beginning with the U.S.-military backed coup in Chile that violently repressed social movements and political organizations on the left. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo of 1973 also fostered plans of a U.S. invasion of oil-producing states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi in order to restore oil exports and reduce oil prices globally. Finally, 1973 was the year in which U.S. foreign investment banks became more actively internationalist in their lending of capital to governments abroad. So-called developing countries were encouraged to borrow excessively, and New York bankers controlled interest rates in U.S. dollars to their advantage. See HARVEY, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 26–27.

12 HARPER, *A People's Art*, 10.

13 For more on the heyday of McLuhanism that emerged between 1965 and 1975, see Donald THEALL, *Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

14 Ian MCKAY, "After Canada: On Amnesia and Apocalyse in the Contemporary Crisis," *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* 28:1 (Autumn 1998): 81.

15 Ian MCKAY, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81:4 (December 2000): 645.

16 McKay argues that "Canada" is best understood as "a historically specific project of rule, rather than either an essence we must defend of an empty homogenous space we must posses." In particular, McKay sees "Canada-as-project" as denoting the historical expansion of liberalism across northern North America. He suggests that the unfolding of this "liberal order" is the principal lens through which historians must now "rethink Canada," thereby abandoning the approach of historical synthesis and moving towards a "reconnaissance" that "will study those at the core of this project who articulated its values, and those 'insiders' and 'outsiders' who resisted and, to some extent at least, reshaped it." See MCKAY, "The Liberal Order Framework," 621.

17 Certainly, it is important to note that Harper was far from the first to identify so-called "primitive" or "folk" art as an area of artistic, scholarly, and curatorial interest in Canada, especially one with nationalist undertones. Harper explained that his interest in "the Canadian vernacular" was first motivated by his knowledge of mid-seventeenth-century "ex-voto paintings of Quebec," which he studied as part of his research for the book *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd edition (Toronto and Laval: University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1977). He described these works as possessing the ability to "tell thrilling stories taken from the simple faith of country folk. It seems appropriate," he therefore insisted, "that most were painted by naïve artists" (16).

18 Francess G. HALPENNY, "J. Russell Harper," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Foundation. Accessed 7 July 2011, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com

19 Virginia NIXON, "Meet J. Russell Harper, Father of Canadian Art History," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 8 Mar. 1975, as cited in Anne WHITELAW, "To Better Know Ourselves: J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History*," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 26:1–2 (2005): 27.

20 Jo Nordley BEGLO, *The Library of J. Russell Harper* [exhibition catalogue] (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2011), n.p. For a complete listing of Harper's writing, see

Brian Foss and Loren Lerner's bibliographic entry "J. Russell Harper, 1914–1983," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 7:2 (1984): 106–12. Whitelaw also provides an important analysis of Harper's role in the English-language historiography of Canadian art in "To Better Know Ourselves," 8–33. For more on this historiography and on the influence of cultural institutions on its development, see also Kristy A. Holmes, "Feminist Art History in Canada: A 'Limited Pursuit'?" in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, ed. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming); Lynda Jessup, "Prospectors, Bushwhackers, Painters: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven" *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 17:1 (1998): 193–214; Lynda Jessup, "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change …," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37:1 (2002): 144–79; Lynda Jessup, "Landscapes of Sport, Landscapes of Exclusion: The 'Sportsman's Paradise' in Late-Nineteenth-Century Canadian Painting," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40:1 (Winter 2006): 71–123; Lianne McTavish, "Beyond the Margins: Re-framing Canadian Art History," *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* 30:1 (Autumn 2000): 104–17; Sandra Paikowsky, "Constructing an Identity: The 1952 xxvi Biennale di Venezia and 'The Projection of Canada Abroad,'" *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 20:1–2 (1999): 130–77; Joyce Zemans, "Establishing the Canon: Nationhood, Identity and the National Gallery of Canada's First Reproduction Program of Canadian Art," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 16:2 (1995): 7–39; Joyce Zemans, "Envisioning Nation: Nationhood, Identity and the Sampson-Matthews Silkscreen Project: The Wartime Prints," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 19:1 (1998): 6–51; Joyce Zemans, "Sampson-Matthews and the NGC: The Post-War Years," *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 21:1–2 (2000): 96–139.

21 "Harper, J. Russell," *Canadian Who's Who* xvii (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 454.

22 Indeed, limiting the pursuits of amateur women collectors, enthusiasts, and workers through the professionalization of white male authority in Canadian museums has been well documented, particularly in Lianne McTavish's "Strategic Donations: Women and Museums in New Brunswick, 1862–1930," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42:2 (Spring 2008): 93–116. While McTavish argues that the "inclusiveness of the museum may have fostered female involvement," she also demonstrates the ways in which women's "marginal position produces a familiar story of women's efforts to gain both power and authority within a male-dominated institution" (96). See also Lianne McTavish and Joshua Dickison, "William Macintosh, Natural History and the Professionalization of the New Brunswick Museum, 1898–1940," *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* 36:2 (2007): 72–90. Anne Whitelaw also recently presented a paper on the significance of women's influence with regard to the acquisition of objects in what McTavish refers to as a "gift economy." Entitled "From the Gift Shop to the Permanent Collection: Art Gallery Women's Societies and the Circulation of Inuit Art," this paper was presented at the conference "Material Culture, Craft and Community: Negotiating Objects Across Time and Place," Material Culture Institute, University of Alberta, 21 May 2011. In particular, Whitelaw charts the influence of women's volunteer organizations in bringing Inuit cultural

production into permanent collections by first positioning such objects in gallery gift shops.

23 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 135; Tonkiss, *Contemporary Economic Sociology*, 92.

24 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10.

25 For more on the interrelation of Canadian, Québécois, and French-Canadian liberal orders and the expansion of nationalism, see Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme, "Introduction: A Project of Rule Called Canada – The Liberal Order Framework and Historical Practice," in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, ed. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 3–32.

26 For more on the connection between labour and the October Crisis, see Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

27 J. Russell Harper, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1973), 13.

28 Paul Mattick, Jr., "The Old Age of Art and Money," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, States Institutions and the Value(s) of Art*, eds. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 67.

29 J. Russell Harper to Peter Desbarats, 3 June 1972, file 6.

30 Ibid. Peter Desbarats is a journalist, writer, broadcaster, and professor who has written and commented extensively on media and politics in Canada in his position as a national affairs columnist for *The Toronto Star* and as Ottawa Bureau Chief and co-anchor for Global Television. Before taking up a post as the Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Western University in 1981, Desbarats worked for three decades as a journalist between Montreal, Winnipeg, and London (UK) writing for the *Gazette*, the *Montreal Star,* the *Winnipeg Tribune*, the CBC, and Reuters. He is also the author of several books, including a biography of former Quebec premier and Parti Québécois founder René Lévesque, entitled *René: A Canadian in Search of a Country* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).

31 J. Russell Harper to Peter Desbarats, 3 June 1972, file 6.

32 Roald Nasgaard makes this observation, for example, in relation to a group of abstract painters from the prairies, The Regina Five, who garnered the attention of the well-known Modernist critic Clement Greenberg and led him to refer to Saskatchewan as "New York's only competitor." See Nasgaard's *Abstract Painting Canada* (Vancouver and Halifax: Douglas & McIntyre and Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2007), 143.

33 Harper, *A People's Art*, 11.

34 In her 2009 dissertation, "Going British and Being Modern in the Visual Art Systems of Canada, 1906–1976," Sarah A. Stanners raises the important point that it is crucial "to recall and assess the British foundations of Canada's sense of modernism in the visual arts" in order to understand the postwar perception "that all modern culture in Canada was born from or is a spin-off of American precedents" (3). Stanners makes this point by examining Canadian collectors of British art, which, as she suggests, had a heavy hand in shaping Canada's dominant institutions of art and

culture, even if this history remains largely "a matter of cultural amnesia" (3). I am grateful to Mark A. Cheetham for alerting me to Stanners's argument.

35 Imre Szeman, *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 201.

36 Ibid., 203.

37 Susan M. Crean, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?* (Don Mills, ON: General Publishing Co., Ltd., 1976), 7.

38 Szeman, *Zones of Instability*, 155.

39 Much of my reading of the use of culture as resource in political and economic expediency is informed by George Yúdice's arguments in *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), in which he suggests that post-industrial societies have increasingly come to treat culture like any other political-economic resource in development strategies. Yet, as Yúdice makes clear, the use of *culture-as-resource* means that it is "much more than a commodity; it is the lynchpin of a new epistemic framework in which ideology and much of what Foucault called disciplinary society (i.e., the inculcation of norms in such institutions as education, medicine, and psychiatry) are absorbed into an economic or ecological rationality, such that management, conservation, access, distribution, and investment – in 'culture' and the outcomes thereof – takes priority" (1).

40 Crean, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?*, 2.

41 I provide a more in-depth analysis of the rhetoric of "decentralization" and "democratization" of the Trudeau government's "culture czar," Gérard Pelletier, in my forthcoming book, *Historical Presenting: The Place of Folk Art in Late Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, especially as it pertains to the regionalist dimensions of his cultural policy initiatives. For a general overview of Pelletier's policies, see also Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 194–96.

42 Szeman, *Zones of Instability*, 153.

43 Edwardson, *Canadian Content*, 112. For a discussion of the Massey Commission on Canadian culture making, see also Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

44 Sociologist Julia Ardery makes a similar argument in her study of the construction of a twentieth-century Appalachian folk art field, noting that as "masters of fine arts programs and new art journals proliferated throughout the 1970s, rural folk artists appeared ever more exceptional in their noncompliance with an increasingly dense cultural system." See Julia Ardery, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 3.

45 J. Russell Harper to Peter Desbarats, 3 June 1972, file 6.

46 Harper, *A People's Art*, 4. To date, I have been unable to find evidence that Harper was purposefully referencing Northrop Frye's preface to his 1971 edited collection of essays, *The Bush Garden*. In it, Frye articulates the question of Canadian identity as a regional one in a language similar to Harper's: "An environment turned outward to the sea, like so much of Newfoundland, and one tuned towards inland seas, like so much of the Maritimes, are an imaginative contrast: anyone who has been conditioned by one in his earliest years can hardly become conditioned by the other

in the same way. Anyone brought up on the urban plain of southern Ontario or the gentle *pays* farmland along the south shore of the St. Lawrence may become fascinated by the great sprawling wilderness of Northern Ontario or Ungava, may move there and live with its people and become accepted as one of them, but if he paints or writes about it he will paint or write as an imaginative foreigner. And what can there be in common between an imagination nurtured on the prairies, where it is a centre of consciousness diffusing itself over a vast flat expanse stretching to the remote horizon, and one nurtured in British Columbia, where it is in the midst of gigantic trees and mountains leaping into the sky all around it, and obliterating the horizon everywhere?" For this reason, I cannot imagine that Harper's use of the "bush garden" metaphor was coincidental. See Northrop FRYE, "Preface to *The Bush Garden* (1971)," in *Northrop Frye on Canada*, ed. Jean O'Grady and David Staines (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 414.

47 HARPER, *A People's Art*, 24.

48 Ibid., 6, 13.

49 J. Russell Harper to Ontario Showcase, Showcase Publishing Co., Ltd., 21 Dec. 1970, file 1.

50 HARPER, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, 16.

51 Ibid.

52 The interrelation of these two terms ("modern" and "primitive") has a long history in modern art historical and anthropological scholarship. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush delineate this interrelation by pointing to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe's search for rationality in the face of the "impending cultural transition" of colonialism. Theorists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim "searched for the ills of modern society," and as Barkan and Bush note, "their ideal types approximated the polarized ideals of the primitive and the civilized. A similar shift occurred in the history of art. Previously, when art historians spoke of the 'primitive,' they usually had in mind the 'naïve' style of Pre-Raphaelite and Colonial American painting – that is, artifacts of the West's own childhood. In the late nineteenth century, however, primitive painting came increasingly to connote the geographically exotic 'savage' – even as violence was beginning to receive its 'positive' modern spin. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the neo-primitivist painters in France were branded Fauves – wild beasts." See Elazar BARKAN and Ronald BUSH, "Introduction," in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 2. For an analysis of modernist-primitivist discourse as it pertains to art history in particular, see Mark ANTLIFF and Patricia LEIGHTEN, "Primitive," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 217–33.

53 Victor LI, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), ix.

54 J. Russell Harper to C.H. Foss, 17 Nov. 1970, file 1.

55 J. Russell Harper to Mrs. G.F. Bowlby, 30 Dec. 1970, file 2.

56 J. Russell Harper to Mrs. G.F. Bowlby, 8 Jan. 1970, file 2. Harper was referring to the prominence of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, which opened at Colonial Williamsburg in 1935 and has helped to define the field of modern and contemporary folk art in the United States since the 1930s. For more on this

collection, see Holger CAHILL, *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in American, 1750–1900* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1932); Nina FLETCHER LITTLE, *The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1957); Abby ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER, *American Folk Art from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1966); and *American Folk Art: The Exhibition of 1932* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1968).

57 J. Russell Harper to Dan Taylor, 8 Jan. 1971.

58 LI, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn*, ix–x.

59 HARPER, *A People's Art*, 4.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 16.

62 See also Lynda JESSUP, "Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven," in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 152, note 70.

63 Ibid., 11.

64 J. Russell Harper to Jean Sutherland Boggs, 30 Jan. 1971, file 2.

65 J. Russell Harper to John Lunn, 30 Dec. 1970.

66 J. Russell Harper to Peter Bell, 7 July 1971, file 3.

67 Newfoundland painter Christopher Pratt is often credited with coining the term "Atlantic Realism," to describe the illusionistic, almost photographic, style of a group of painters who worked in Atlantic Canada during the late twentieth century around such centres as Sackville, Wolfville, and St. John's. This group generally includes Christopher Pratt, Mary Pratt, and Alex Colville. For more, see Josée DROUIN-BRISEBOIS and Jeffrey SPALDING, *Christopher Pratt: All My Own Work* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2005); Mark A. CHEETHAM, *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994); Mark A. CHEETHAM, "The World, the Work, and the Artist: Colville and the Communality of Vision," *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 15:1 (1988): 58–63; Mark A. CHEETHAM, "Colville and Paton: Two Paradigms of Value," in *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions and the Value(s) of Art*, ed. Jody Berland and Shelley Hornstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 116–21; Sandra GWYN and Gerta MORAY, *Mary Pratt* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989); Joyce ZEMANS, *Christopher Pratt: A retrospecive organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985); and Charlotte Cliff EYLAND, Charlotte TOWNSEND-GAULT, and Gemey KELLY, "Atque Ars." Accessed 12 Mar. 2013, http://www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art/content/galleryoneoneone/atque.html.

68 J. Russell Harper to Alex Colville, 30 Jan. 1970, file 2.

69 J. Russell Harper to Moncrieff Williamson, 15 July 1971, file 3.

70 J. Russell Harper to James B. Stanton, 16 June 1971.

71 J. Russell Harper to Miss Gamble, 3 June 1972, file 6.

72 HARPER, *A People's Art*, 11.

73 Ibid.

74 J. Russell Harper to Alice Blackstock, 8 June 1971, file 3.

75 J. Russell Harper to Jean Sutherland Boggs, 30 Jan. 1971, file 2.

76 J. Russell Harper to Frances Halpenny, 30 Jan. 1971.

77 J. Russell Harper to Jean Sutherland Boggs, 20 July 1972, file 6.
78 J. Russell Harper to Pierre Théberge, 7 Sept. 1972, file 2.
79 Harper, *A People's Art*, 6.
80 Norah McCullough, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1958). This exhibition opened at the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK, 4–25 Sept. 1959, and toured to the Calgary Allied Arts Centre, Calgary, AB, 2–23 Oct. 1959; the University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, 30 Oct.–20 Nov. 1959; the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC, 30 Nov.–27 Dec. 1959; the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, MB, 8–29 Jan. 1960; the Saskatoon Art Centre, Saskatoon, SK, 5–26 Feb. 1960; the Halifax Memorial Library, Halifax, NS, 24 Mar.–22 Apr. 1960; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON, 27 May–4 Sept. 1960; the Charles and Emma Frye Museum, Seattle, WA, 2–23 Apr. 1961; the Historical Society of Montana, Helena, MT, 7–28 May 1961; the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, San Diego, CA, 11 June–2 July 1961; the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, VA, 1–24 Sept. 1961; the Loch Haven Art Center, Orlando, FL, 12 Nov.–3 Dec. 1961; the State University College of Education, Plattsburgh, NY, 1–22 Jan. 1962; and the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, NJ, 4–25 Feb. 1962. Charles F. Comfort to Sydney H. Barker, 2 May 1962, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-5-9, volume 2, National Gallery of Canada Library-Archives, National Gallery of Canada Fonds, National Gallery of Canada Exhibitions (hereafter cited as Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition).
81 Harper, *A People's Art*, 6.
82 Sandra Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 23–25; Dawna Doris Gallagher, "Bringing Art to the People: A Biography of Norah McCullough" (MA thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1997), 133. I am grateful to my former MA student, Gillian Bourke, for bringing Gallagher's thesis to my attention during her own research on McCullough.
83 Eric Brown quoted in Douglas Ord, *The National Gallery of Canada: Ideas, Art, Architecture* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 143.
84 Norah McCullough to Mary Perich, 21 Mar. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
85 Norah McCullough to Maxwell Bates, 5 June 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 2.
86 Maxwell Bates to Norah McCullough, 12 May 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 2.
87 Norah McCullough to Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, 2 Feb. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
88 Leslie Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 2.
89 Ibid., 8, 23.
90 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* [exhibition catalogue] (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1927) and University of Toronto Libraries, Canadian Pamphlets and Broadsides collection. Accessed 6 Aug. 2011, http://link.library.utoronto.ca/broadsides/search.cfm.
91 Eric Brown quoted in Lynda Jessup, "Marius Barbeau and Early Ethnographic Cinema," in *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture*,

ed. Lynda Jessup, Andrew Nurse, and Gordon E. Smith (Gatineau: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008), 290.

92 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art*, 2.

93 Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness*, 8, 113.

94 Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 74. Moreover, in the early 1940s, publications such as Jean-Marie Gauvreau's *Artisans du Québec. 80 illustrations en hors-texte* (Trois-Rivières: Les Éditions du Bien public, 1940) and Barbeau's *Maîtres artisans de chez-nous* (Montreal: Les Éditions du Zodiaque, 1942) generated increased museological interest in collecting the popular arts of Quebec, objects that entered Québécois museum collections en masse during the 1960s. In 1940, self-taught Charlevoix artist Simone-Mary Bouchard exhibited her work at the Art Association of Montreal (now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) with the help of Morgan and his wife, artist Maud Cabot, prompting the combination of and thus the "Charlevoix Primitives" were displayed alongside such professionally-trained, modern artists as Paul-Émile Bourduas, John Lyman, and Alfred Pellan in Quebec and abroad. See Jean Simard, "L'art populaire dans la collection du Musée de la civilization de Québec," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29:1 (Spring 1994): 47 and Lora Senechal Carney, "Modernists and Folk on the Lower St. Lawrence: The Problem of Folk Art," in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience*, 113.

95 Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness*, 272. "We now consider 'primitive' a fighting word," as Barkan and Bush explain, for example. "Like 'savage,' it is a racist designation. In contrast, primitivism denotes an Occidental construction, a set of representations whose 'reality' is purely Western." Barkan and Bush, "Introduction," in *Prehistories of the Future,* 2. See also James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Christopher B. Steiner, *African Art in Transit* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994); George E. Marcus and Fred Myers, "The Traffic in Art and Culture: An Introduction," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1–51; Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700–1900* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998); Lynda Jessup, "Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: An Introduction," in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 3–10; and Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

96 Harper, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, 6.

97 John Murray Gibbon, *The Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1938). See also Stuart Henderson, "'While there is Still Time … ': J. Murray Gibbon and the Spectacle of Difference in Three CPR Folk Festivals, 1928–1932," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 39:1 (Winter 2005): 139–74.

98 Richard J.F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 146.

99 HENDERSON, "'While there is Still Time,'" 141.
100 I am grateful to Andrew Nurse for suggesting this reading and phrasing of Gibbon's goals based on GIBBON's novel *Pagan Love* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922), and essay, "The Foreign Born," *Queen's Quarterly* 17:4 (1920): 331–51.
101 HENDERSON, "'While there is Still Time,'" 141–42.
102 In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [1983]), Johannes FABIAN defines the process of allochronic distancing historically imposed on non-European societies by anthropologists as a denial of coevalness. Fabian explains the contradiction as anthropologists of the "here and now" denying coeval time and space to their ethnographic subjects by relating them to the "then and there": "The Other's empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence, a conjuring truck which is worked with an array of devices that have the common intent and function to keep the Other outside the time of anthropology" (xli).
103 MCCULLOUGH, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*, n.p.
104 HARPER, *A People's Art*, 7.
105 Norah McCullough to Christa Deddering, 5 Jan. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
106 Norah McCullough to Louise Dresser, 28 Feb. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
107 Jean LIPMAN, *American Primitive Painting* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 5.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., 8.
110 Alice FORD et al., "What is American Folk Art?" *The Studio* 141:696 (March 1951): 88.
111 Norah McCullough to Richard Simmins, 28 Feb. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
112 Richard Simmins to Norah McCullough, memorandum, 4 Mar. 1959, Folk Painters of the Canadian West Exhibition, 12-4-49, volume 1.
113 Alan JARVIS, "Foreword," in Norah MCCULLOUGH, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1958), n.p.
114 MCCULLOUGH, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*, n.p.
115 Ibid.
116 J. Russell Harper to The Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliot Trudeau, 18 Mar. 1972, file 5.
117 J. Russell Harper to R.W. Finlayson, 15 Nov. 1971, file 12.
118 DAY, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*, 22.
119 Ibid., 176.
120 Ibid., 158.
121 Himani BANNERJI, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 9.
122 My phrasing here is informed by Ruth B. Phillips's research on Norval Morrisseau and what she sees as the sporadic entrance of modernist-primitivism into the Canadian art world before the mid-twentieth century. As she puts it, reviewers of a 1962 Morrisseau exhibition "had difficulty fitting his paintings into the available categories of the primitive, the folk, and the modern" (68). See Ruth B. PHILLIPS, "Morrisseau's 'Entrance': Negotiating Primitivism, Modernism, and Anishnaabe Tradition," in *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist*, eds. Greg A. Hill, Norval

Morrisseau, Ruth B. Phillips and Armand Garnet Ruffo (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 42–77.

123 Harper, *A People's Art*, 7.

124 Ibid., 7–8.

125 Ibid.

126 McCullough, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*, n.p.

127 R.L. Bloore, "Folk Painters of the Canadian West: Jan G. Wyers," *Canadian Art* 17:2 (March 1960). Accessed 21 Aug. 2011, http://www.ccca.ca/c/writing/b/bloore/bloo011.html

128 Harper, *A People's Art*, plate 51 caption, n.p.

129 McCullough, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*, n.p.

130 Harper, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, 82.

131 Ibid., 114.

132 Ibid., 22.

133 Virginia Nixon, "Meet J. Russell Harper, Father of Canadian Art History," *The Gazette*, 8 Mar. 1975. Accessed in Library and Archives Canada, J. Russell Harper fonds, MG 30 D 352, "Correspondence, Research, Reviews," n.d., 1862–1978, volume 47, file 3.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Harper, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, 140.

138 Ibid., 164.

139 Harper, *A People's Art*, 10.

140 Ibid., 11.

141 Harper, *People's Art: Naïve Art in Canada*, 14.

RÉSUMÉ

Aux frontières de la réalité populaire : J. Russell Harper et la quête de « L'art populaire »

ERIN MORTON

Historien de l'art et conservateur, J. Russell Harper (1914–1983) a joué un rôle prépondérant pour établir l'histoire de l'art canadien comme champ d'études à part entière dans les musées et le milieu universitaire à la fin du XXe siècle. Dans les décennies 1950 et 1960, il a occupé divers postes dans des musées prestigieux, dont la Galerie nationale du Canada (Musée des beaux-arts du Canada) et le Musée McCord, avant de terminer sa carrière comme professeur à la Sir George Williams University (maintenant l'Université Concordia), de 1967 à 1979. Un grand nombre de ses publications de l'époque sur l'histoire de l'art canadien sont bien connues aujourd'hui, notamment la première étude bilingue réalisée dans cette discipline, *La peinture au Canada des origines à nos jours* (1966). Toutefois, le milieu de la recherche ne s'est pas encore penché sur l'un de ses plus grands projets, soit l'exposition *L'art populaire : l'art naïf au Canada* présentée en 1973 à la Galerie nationale du Canada.

Le présent article aborde *L'art populaire* par un examen des archives du projet, qui comprennent les articles de Harper appartenant à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, les dossiers d'exposition au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada ainsi que le catalogue d'exposition et la monographie complémentaire *A People's Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial, and Folk Painting in Canada*, publiée en 1974 par la University of Toronto Press. En premier lieu, il existe, selon moi, un lien entre la quête de Harper pour définir ce qu'il a appelé la « réalité populaire » (*Canadian vernacular*) et le début de l'ère post-industrielle dans les sociétés capitalistes avancées, comme l'était le Canada après 1973. Ce moment a coïncidé avec la fin de la période du capitalisme fordiste d'après-guerre, durant laquelle le système industriel reposait grandement sur la production intérieure et où la consommation définissait l'économie canadienne. Tandis que ce système disparaissait, il fallait chercher ailleurs matière à alimenter le mythe de la paisible société née de colons européens, puisque la réalité ne pouvait maintenant plus entretenir l'idéal culturel canadien. Je cherche ici à démontrer que les changements d'alors ont ébranlé la définition du Canada comme État-nation et celle de l'art canadien que tentait d'établir Harper. En examinant le mythe de la paisible colonie européenne, il cherchait les indices culturels d'une « nation » et les

fondements d'un discours selon lequel il existait une culture façonnée par les colons immigrants européens ayant administré le territoire qu'était devenu le Canada. Cependant, l'objectif de Harper consistant à utiliser l'hétérogénéité régionale, ethnique et linguistique pour consolider la souveraineté nationale doit, à mon avis, être placé dans un cadre politique et culturel marqué par la redéfinition de l'identité du Canada, tout comme l'hégémonie libérale doit être étudiée dans la réalité de la période post-industrielle. La difficulté était contextuelle, bien que Harper n'ait par ailleurs pas pu trouver ce qu'il cherchait dans le milieu de l'art contemporain; le changement des paramètres d'une apparente culture nationale était déjà amorcé, alors que s'effondrait le système économique dans lequel le maintien de la souveraineté nationale reposait sur le capitalisme libéral.

En deuxième lieu, je souhaite souligner que *L'art populaire* s'inspirait du discours moderniste primitiviste des universitaires et du milieu de l'art muséologique canadien du début et du milieu du XXe siècle, et de l'évolution de ce discours. À mon avis, l'objectif de Harper consistait en partie à établir un langage matériel et conceptuel définissant la culture canadienne qu'il cherchait à dépeindre. À cette fin, il a pris le même chemin que celui emprunté par de nombreux autres nationalistes culturels de l'après-guerre, qui ont recensé les manifestations culturelles régionales correspondant au projet national qu'ils envisageaient. Harper a aussi puisé dans des expositions ayant constitué des précédents, par exemple celle de Norah McCullough à la Galerie nationale du Canada en 1959, *Folk Painters of the Canadian West*. Harper a dit de cette exposition qu'elle était avant-gardiste pour la région, car elle recensait des artistes populaires établis des provinces de l'Ouest qui pouvaient présenter une certaine vision du Canada rural aux citadins de la capitale du Canada. En outre, dans *L'art populaire*, Harper a étudié le passé matériel des sociétés agraires de colons immigrants ayant marqué son enfance, et dans lesquelles il a trouvé le remède pour contrer l'influence croissante des États-Unis sur l'élite artistique aussi bien que sur la culture de masse. Afin de consolider sa vision du présent, Harper a dû chercher un moyen d'unifier sous une identité nationale diverses formes culturelles régionales témoignant du passé d'un peuple de colons. Il lui a aussi fallu trouver un langage qui décrive efficacement les vestiges de « l'art populaire ». Le portrait des « régions » tracé par Harper soulève, selon moi, un certain paradoxe. En effet, il appuyait précisément son autorité dans l'établissement de l'art canadien central sur des lieux d'influence prétendument marginaux. L'étude de *L'art populaire* met donc au jour la contradiction qui apparaît lorsqu'on présente une réalité « régionale » en suivant une logique de nationalisation.

En terminant, je souhaite aborder des particularités de *L'art populaire*, à savoir les œuvres de William Panko (1892–1948), de Jan Wyers (1888–1973) et

d'Arthur Villeneuve (1910–1990). Il convient de souligner qu'en retenant leurs œuvres, Harper a démontré que ces artistes prétendument naïfs pouvaient selon lui rejeter le système culturel transnational de plus en plus privatisé qui caractérisait la production artistique au Canada. Même si Harper lui-même travaillait principalement auprès de l'élite artistique dans les universités et les musées bien en vue au Canada, il ne croyait pas ces milieux capables de se soustraire à l'influence culturelle des États-Unis sur l'art. Sa recherche artistique dans ce qu'il a appelé « le panorama social et culturel de l'homme ordinaire » lui a permis d'affirmer qu'il était possible de puiser dans le riche passé de la société agraire de colons européens formant maintenant le Canada pour trouver un langage populaire commun dans le contexte de l'importante transition culturelle et socioéconomique en cours. Bien que Harper ait tenté d'établir une certaine distance temporelle entre les représentations du travail agricole des colons européens dans les œuvres de Panko, de Wyers et de Villeneuve, c'est la nature contemporaine de leurs travaux qui lui a permis de les classer parmi les artistes « primitifs ». Fait important, pour Harper, ces artistes demeuraient non seulement loin des tendances artistiques dans les milieux intellectuels, mais ils ignoraient aussi le paysage politique et culturel ayant marqué la fin des années 1960 et le début des années 1970 au Canada. À mon avis, par son exposition, Harper a tenté, en dernière analyse, de rapprocher deux visions : celle de la reconnaissance de la transformation post-industrielle du paysage culturel d'un Canada bilingue, officiellement multiculturel et formé de régions différentes, et celle des partisans de l'illustration historique coloniale du pays, qui privilégiaient le maintien d'un État-nation impérial britannique unilingue, protestant, libéral et capitaliste. Il est toutefois paradoxal que Harper ait utilisé *L'art populaire* afin de dénoncer l'orientation d'un champ d'études qu'il avait lui-même contribué de manière si directe à définir. Finalement, l'étude de l'exposition *L'art populaire* de J. Russell Harper montre dans quelle mesure la réalité populaire canadienne qu'il a cherché à dépeindre était tout aussi éphémère que l'idéologie nationaliste libérale dominante qui l'avait mené à entreprendre sa quête.