ARTICLE

Gendering the Artistic Field

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In 1927, in one of the better-documented events in Canadian art history, Emily Carr (1871–1945) made the long trip from Victoria to Toronto for the *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* exhibition, in which her work was prominently featured. Studies of Carr note that her inclusion in this exhibition marked a turning point in her career.[1] For Carr, meeting the members of the Group of Seven was particularly important because it highlighted the differences between her situation in Victoria and the central Canadian art world. In her journal, she reflected on this difference as she worried about the quality of her own paintings. "Their works," she confided to her journal,

> call to my very soul. Will they know what's in me by those old Indian pictures, or will they feel disappointment and find me small and weak and fretful? Have the carps and frets and worries that have eaten into my soul, since I returned from Paris full of ambition and then had to struggle out there alone, made me small and mean, poor and petty – bitter? They too have had to struggle and buffer, but they've stood together.[2]

In addition to her sense of isolation, Carr also worried about her gender. Here, her response was more ambiguous. Two days earlier, she had asked herself if being a woman made a difference to what she hoped could be common artistic cause. At first, she decided that it did, but just as quickly dismissed the idea and turned her attention to artistic skills that, to her, transcended gender:

> I wonder if these men feel, as I do, that there is common chord between us. No, I don't believe they feel so toward a woman. I'm way behind them in drawing and in composition and rhythm and planes but I know inside me what they're after and I feel that perhaps, given a chance, I could get it too.[3]

Carr's enthusiasm and ambiguity, her questions about art and gender, encapsulated not simply her own situation and development as an artist but, I will argue, the gendered dynamics of an evolving artistic "field" in Canada. Emily Carr's well-documented life and career provide an effective case study into the development of what I will argue was a semi-autonomous artistic field in modern Canada. More specifically, Carr's artistic career and personal life highlight how the development of a modern artistic field reorganized gender relations in the arts. I argue that this development displaced an earlier gendered social organization of the arts but did not – and could not – completely isolate the arts from broader social patterns. This reorganization created a new space for professionalized women artists by virtue of its commitment to an autonomous aesthetic. As with other socio-cultural fields, however, the Canadian artistic field was limited in two ways. First, it remained connected to society; hence broader patterns of gender relations always intruded upon it. Second, its semi-autonomous nature limited the degree to which changes in the artistic field effected broader social change. For women, this meant that the possibility of increased equality in professionalized artistic practice in Canada did not signify equality in Canadian society.

This essay addresses this issue in five parts. First, I will examine the concept of an artistic field and what its development tells us about the historical sociology of Canadian art. Here I will rely on Pierre Bourdieu's classic formulation, but look to deepen his framework by integrating a gendered perspective into it. Second, I will explore the development of an artistic field in Canada, paying particular attention to how it changed the social and economic organization of the arts from a gendered perspective. Here I will suggest that the emerging artistic field was caught in a twofold tension between itself and a pre-existing social organization of the arts, on the one hand, and the ideal of an autonomous aesthetic and the gendered character of the evolving institutions that helped to realize this ideal, on the other. Third, I will describe Carr's views on art to situate them within developing conceptions of aesthetic and artistic autonomy that were consistent with an emerging artistic field. Fourth, I will turn to how Carr negotiated the complex tensions that challenged but could not completely elide prevailing gendered social norms in the arts. I will conclude by looking at what Carr's career demonstrates about evolving gender relations in the arts and how they affected women artists, such as Carr, who were committed to the ideal of art as a professional career and an autonomous aesthetic. For Carr, I conclude, these commitments created a complicated

series of gender relations that became, at times, intensely isolating for her as a woman artist.

The Social Organization of Modern Art

Over the last generation, Canadian art and cultural historians have produced an impressive body of scholarship that has fundamentally restructured the Canadian cultural narrative. This reorganization has proceeded in a variety of ways that integrate interdisciplinary heuristics to look at how power, ideology, gender, and institutions function to sustain or marginalize specific forms of artistic practice. Bourdieu's conception of cultural fields can contribute to this analysis. As a form of historical sociology, its aim is to recast historical analysis by applying analytic frameworks drawn from sociology so as to more accurately capture the structural dynamics of historical change. Bourdieu's studies of French cultural history were designed with precisely this goal in mind.[4] They are particularly relevant to the study of Canadian art history because they can expose the institutional structure of Canadian artistic modernity. More exactly, what they can show is the development of a semi-autonomous artistic field.

An artistic field is both an ideological and institutional construct. Ideologically, a field functions through a discursive system that establishes values, power, hierarchy, and currency. The institutional apparatus of a field organizes and sustains specific value structures and the social relations that follow from them. In the case of an artistic field, as Anne Whitelaw's work suggests, it is the institutional organization of society that creates the space for forms of art to come into being and that structures their meaning.[5] According to Bourdieu, society is divided into a series of fields that are linked to each other but also strive to operate according to their own logic. In capitalist societies, all fields maintain some form of currency; that is: goods (symbolic or material) that circulate both within (and, to a lesser degree, outside) the field and that carry value.[6] Under conditions of capitalism, economic relations are determined by market values, but these values are modified within discrete fields. As Bourdieu explained in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans. 1984), cultural fields are organized through a set of rules that privilege two different currencies: economic currency (money) and cultural capital, which can be defined as taste. That is, an individual's knowledge of cultural goods, ability to make distinctions between them, and participation in specific cultural processes become currencies in themselves that divide their bearers into hierarchical relations with each other.[7]

Fields are never completely separated from society. This creates a dynamic tension that both pushes fields toward autonomous systems of social rules

and simultaneously works to integrate them into the logic of the society in which they are set. Bourdieu's early work on museums and their publics, cultural consumption, and nineteenth-century French literature constitutes studies into the operation of cultural fields.[8] His empirical research suggests that fields are far from homogeneous. Distinct fields mirror the class structure of the wider society but make space as well for different forms of capital that both circulate and are accumulated. Social agents are not powerless, but the structural frameworks of socio-cultural fields create imperatives that bind individual subjects.

One of the key bounding dynamics is "habitus," or social position. Social positions, as Bourdieu notes, "are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be isolated individuals, groups, or institutions."[9] In this sense, a habitus is an ascribed identity, but it can also be mobilized through individual, collective, or institutional action in ways that affect the overall organization of socio-cultural fields.[10] A key to this way of thinking about social organization is that semi-autonomy brings to a field both possibilities and limitations that are directly connected to the degree of autonomy it enjoys. For example, a semi-autonomous artistic field can self-organize. Its power relations do not inherently reflect, say, the gendered or market dynamics of society. On the other hand, autonomy can also become delimiting in the sense that changes to a field do not necessarily create change in other fields or in the wider society. At the same time, the broader social institutions and structures – say, the market structure of capitalism or the gendered discourses of patriarchy – also pull fields back toward wider patterns.

Gender is an important component of socio-economic fields. While Bourdieu did not explicitly address gender in his classic formulations of field and habitus, he did recognize that gender issues were important to both social processes and discursive and institutional dynamics.[11] He also viewed the domestic sphere as a site of cultural politics within which socially constructed hierarchies became embedded as social practice. For Bourdieu, gender did not exist – even as social practice – unto itself. It was always embedded in and interacted with other social practices.[12] Said differently, a gender-defined habitus worked dialogically: it both framed the organization of socio-cultural fields, and was framed by them.

Bourdieu's conception of an artistic field works with a set of methodological problems that are similar to current feminist studies of artistic professionalism. Artistic professionalism, as historians of Canadian women's art recognize, has had complex and ambiguous effects on women involved in cultural production. On the one hand, it could work with established gendered conceptions of cultural production that made the

arts a legitimate pursuit for women. On the other, professionalizing artistic institutions in Canada tended to exclude women and treat their cultural work as the purview of "amateurs."[13] Professionalism, as studies of professional women artists note, is both an important and a complex concept. It is best viewed, like an artistic field, as an historical process and construct that both carries meaning and serves to institutionally organize artistic practice. In other words, exactly what it means to be a professional changes over time. In Canada, professionalism was important to the development of an artistic field for two reasons. First, professionalism carried with it a conception of authority that allowed artists – and allied intellectuals – to define legitimate aesthetics independent of other social imperatives. In other words, it facilitated the construction of an autonomous aesthetic. Second, it made the arts into an occupation with its own systems of training, modes of certification, and organizations. For women such as Emily Carr who aspired to professional careers in the arts, this meant that they needed to both transcend previous forms of artistic social organization and claim a particular habitus that was not exclusively or simply defined as male, but which nevertheless maintained restrictions on women's entrance to the field. In Carr's case, this required her to negotiate a complicated series of gendered cultural dynamics in a way that affected her on a personal level.

Gender and the Institutional Organization of Canadian Art

Colonial and early Confederation-era discourse presented the arts as an element of "civilization."[14] The arts were discursively constructed as markers of refinement, grace, and elevated moral and aesthetic purpose. They were, as well, markers of distinctiveness, separating the supposedly more plebian pastimes of artisans, workers, and the rural poor from the elevated leisure of the colonial elite. As Marylin McKay has explained with regard to colonial landscape painting, artistry was not a profession in itself. Instead, it was a leisure activity practiced by those with the necessary time and educational background. It was also often embedded in other discourses that linked it to military, natural historical, or botanical illustration.[15] With regard to style, colonial and early-Confederation era artistry looked to imperial centres for guidance.[16] At least some colonial discourse adopted an apologetic tone, suggesting that Canada's stage of development was not yet sufficient to allow for the full flowering of art seen in Europe.[17]

Gender played an important role in both this discourse and the social organization of the arts that followed from it. For the colonial and early Confederation-era elite, women's proficiency in the arts was an important marker of class position and one's standing in polite society. Art was a means to an end. Etiquette books encouraged women's artistic expression in home

decoration but discouraged the individual self-expression that became, for Carr and others, such an important marker of the autonomous artistic field of the twentieth century. Sedate watercolours, for example, could be used to complement furnishings.[18] Likewise, the *Ladies Book of Useful Information* (1896) emphasized the importance of women's craftwork for home decoration.[19]

Private schools for girls reiterated the same discourse. The Church School for Girls in Windsor, Nova Scotia, for example, displayed its art studios on the front of its calendar and boasted of new additions that created more space for art and music education. Its provincial act of incorporation specified that it was designed to educate "girls and young women in the various branches of literature, science, and art."[20] The courses it provided were not unusual for their time. The school's tuition, and extra charges for painting and drawing instruction, likely priced this education outside the ability of families below the upper middle class. Art options proved popular with students and, one presumes, their families. In 1896, the school reported that 27 girls were enrolled in drawing, 17 in painting, 10 in china painting, and 17 in needlework. More senior classes in art history focused on old masters and the modern canon.[21] What these young women were taught was a classical Eurocentric canon and its appreciation. The goal was not to produce professional artists, but to produce refined women who could converse on the arts and practice artistry as a leisure or decorative pursuit. Ottawa's Congregation of Notre Dame Educational Establishment for Young Ladies' calendar explained its goals: "The object of the school is to 'aim at giving such instruction to the students that they can go into the kitchen and cook a dinner, and from thence to the drawing room and entertain their guests.'"[22] These same types of institutions were evident in Victoria during Carr's youth and constitute, in fact, the basis of the first educational exposure she and her sisters had to the arts.[23]

Within this discursive and institutional framework, art circulated according to a specific logic. Canadian artistic goods occupied a secondary market position vis-à-vis European old masters in terms of both consumption and cultural capital.[24] In English-speaking Canada, some artists maintained connections with the social elite,[25] who also served as patrons of the arts, but patronage did not translate into a vibrant art market for either male or female artists. Exhibitions organized by fledgling galleries or artists' organizations, as Emily Carr discovered early in her career, did not usually produce appreciable sales, and artists were forced to find a series of innovative ways both to sell their work and to supplement their income, including lessons, reproductions, subscription sales, and other forms of occupational pluralism.[26] Institutional patronage provided only modest support. As Ellen McLeod reports, the Art Association of Montreal – one of the leading artistic organizations in

the country – "did not purchase Canadian art. In its acquisitions, the AAM almost totally neglected Canadian artists because of its pre-occupation with European painting."[27]

Women artists occupied a tertiary position in this market and even intentionally disguised their involvement in the arts labour force, as Susanna Moodie explained in *Roughing it in the Bush*:

> I practiced a method of painting birds and butterflies upon the white, velvety surface of the large fungi that grow plentifully upon the bark of the sugar maple. These had an attractive appearance; and my brother, who was a captain in the provincial regiments, sold a great many of them among the officers without saying by whom they were painted.[28]

Women also worked in the artistic labour market as teachers at women's academies, as illustrators, and by exhibiting their work anonymously. A more limited number of women worked professionally in creative production. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, as the artistic field gained greater institutional support, this included portraiture, silhouettes, miniatures, and landscape.[29]

The movement to a new form of artistic social organization began before Confederation and proceeded unevenly both across the country and in relation to men and women. This development was structured by a variety of social actors that included the state, the social elite, critics, and artists themselves. Formal institutions, such as galleries and artists' societies, could advance Canadian artistic production and autonomy by mobilizing aesthetic standards, circulating art in society through exhibitions, and enhancing arts education.[30] This development was most evident in central Canada[31] where the creation of the National Gallery and the emergence of arts societies in Ontario and Quebec both enhanced the cultural power of art institutions and increasingly supplemented weak art markets. In Canada, the growth of an artistic field was also dialogically related to cultural nationalism and the post-First World War growth of modernist aesthetics. One cannot directly map the growth of modernist aesthetics onto the development of the Canadian artistic field. Carr, for example, was personally committed to an ideal of art and a professional artistic career before her embrace of more modern artistic styles. But the growing popularity of the Group of Seven served as criticism of established academic art that was linked to conceptions of grace and refinement and detached the art market from its focus on these styles. It also provided a means for artists to work with a conception of art that was not ideologically bound to constructions of social class and gender.

As Carr also discovered, the development of an artistic field did not inherently advance women's place in the arts. It had important implications for women as artists in that an autonomous aesthetic was, theoretically, gender-neutral. This was how Carr defined art and how it was presented by leading artistic figures of the day. For example, the mandate of the Beaver Hall group focused on creative expression that did not discursively adhere to men or women even while it continued to deploy a gendered language. It aimed "to give the artist the assurance that he can paint what he feels, with utter disregard for what has hitherto been considered requisite to the acceptance of work at the recognized art exhibitions in Canadian centres. Schools and 'isms' do not trouble us; individual expression is our chief concern."[32] A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), whose attitudes toward women later troubled Carr, made this same point and captured the ambiguity of the artistic field with regard to gender in comments he made about the art of Prudence Heward (1896–1947). When asked if Heward was one of the "best women painters" of her time, Jackson "became slightly irritable and replied ' . . . forget the woman part . . . In my opinion, she was the very best painter we ever had in Canada and she never got the recognition she richly deserved in her lifetime. I wanted her to join the Group of Seven, but like the Twelve Apostles, no women were included.'"[33] The Royal Canadian Academy (RCA) and other art organizations maintained similar prohibitions. Moreover, the exclusion of women was also applied to forms of creative expression dominated by women. With regard to the RCA, Mary Ella Dignam (1857–1938) noted, "[i]t was thought necessary to supply a clause in the constitution 'prohibiting the admission of – needlework, artificial flowers, cut paper, shellwork, models in coloured wax or any such performances'" from the definition of what constituted legitimate art work for diploma purposes. This clause, in Dignam's view "explains the status of women in art."[34] Said differently, from their beginning key institutions of a semi-autonomous artistic field in Canada reinforced established conceptions of gender in both the arts and the wider society by excluding key elements of women's cultural production from the definition of art.

In other ways, however, the rules of the developing artistic field could subvert gendered distinctions. Two considerations were important. First, through the state (federal and provincial) and the support of key patrons, the developing artistic field in Canada brought with it a reorganization of Canadian art markets. In effect, the state and key patrons created a market for Canadian art that partially separated artists from the logic of a free market. In the 1920s, with the rising influence of the Group of Seven, this market privileged specific forms of painting underwritten by the cultural capital of its producers and the institutional power of its patrons. In other

words, a new market for art in the general population did not suddenly develop.[35] What was developing was a market for artistic goods based in state institutions in which aesthetics – as opposed to the market – became a key to value.[36] Second, the evolving artistic field redefined exactly what constituted the practice of art. The older social organization of the arts that linked art to "elevated" elite pursuits remained an important element of public commentary in twentieth-century Canada.[37] But, the evolving artistic field increasingly linked art to a self-referential aesthetic. This self-referentiality, like the artistic field itself, was never complete and artists alone did not define it. They were both aided by and at times competed with patrons, intellectuals, critics, and gallery officials. The key, however, as the critic Graham McInnes noted, was that good artistic practice was defined by aesthetics.[38] What was important to these rules was that they were not inherently gendered. As Carr discovered, gendered social expectations clearly affected the evolving artistic field but, for her, one of the things that created confusion was that the criteria of art itself was discursively constructed so as to proceed on other grounds. The test of art was supposed to be its aesthetic; not the gender of the artist.

Emily Carr and the Practice of Art

Carr's efforts to build an artistic career for herself followed a similar path to that of other women artists. Women responded to sexism in the artistic field in a variety of ways, as Susan Butlin's work on professional women artists describes in detail. Some women artists banded together; others collaborated with male friends and colleagues, and still others created their own woman-centric art societies.[39] As Emily Carr discovered, some women artists elected to remain overseas, after studying outside Canada, to build a career for themselves. Carr's biographical information is well known. She was born in 1871 in Victoria, British Columbia, into a devoutly Protestant middle-class family. She was first educated at home by an older sister and then in local academies and public school. She took art lessons, something that was not unusual for a young middle-class woman of her time. By all accounts, Carr chafed under the restrictions of the gendered social conventions of her time, both within her family and in the broader community. After her father's death in 1888, she left high school and used some of her inheritance to pursue an education in the arts and seems, at this point, to have set her mind on an artistic career. She was formally trained, like many other women of her time, outside Canada, first in San Francisco and then England and finally in France. Her education was punctuated by returns home where she was active in local arts organizations, exhibited her work (both through local organizations and in her own studio), and taught art classes, primarily to children.[40]

The difficulties of the early twentieth-century Canadian art market plagued Carr and, for a variety of reasons, the professional recognition for which she was looking eluded her until the late 1920s. To make a living, she engaged in an arts version of occupational plurality: teaching, selling the odd painting, making tourist souvenirs, and running a boarding house. This occupational pluralism continued over time in modified form. As the popularity of her art increased in the late 1920s, she devoted more time to painting and exhibiting but continued some craft production and began to write. At the time of her death, Carr had become a nationally recognized painter and author, a winner of the Governor General's award for her prose, whose paintings were preserved by a special trust to ensure posterity access to her work.

Carr's conception of art linked its practice to the autonomous aesthetic developing in the artistic field. Like the Beaver Hall group, she disavowed labels and did not like to talk about "isms" in the arts.[41] Instead, Carr thought of art as either creative or formulaic.[42] For her, true art was creative and the basis of creativity lay in personal emotional expression. Emotional expression need not be pleasing; it could "irritate" and "stir," but it was this very quality that made art stimulating and vital. "It may stir and irritate, but isn't it more entertaining and stimulating even to feel something unpleasant than to feel nothing at all – just a void? There is such a lot of drab stodginess in the world that it's delicious to get a thrill out of something."[43] This same quality separated art from "mechanical" reproduction. Expression lent individuality to representation, opening up any scene to a different – what Carr called "fresh" – way of seeing. Without emotional expression, artistry devolved into faithful reproduction akin to photography or more realistic academic modes of painting. Emotional expression, however, also had to be directed to a deeper understanding of the world. The true artist strove to get beneath "surface appearances" so as to understand and represent the spiritual dynamics of life. In Carr's view, this was the quality that connected all great art across time.[44]

Carr's argument and the examples she used capture both her own thinking on art and a moment in the development of the Canadian artistic field. The types of art that Carr rejected represented an older way of thinking about artistic representation and its valuation of painterly skill over emotional expression. This was a mode of representation, Carr understood, appreciated by the Victoria elite. Her own interventions into the artistic controversies of her day and the developing quality of her painting constituted an effort to make a space for herself as a professional artist by promoting an aesthetic that was not linked to gendered social and class conventions. She pointed to the Group of Seven as an example of "real art" in the Canadian context and the

National Gallery as a progressive institution that promoted its development.[45] In effect, Carr publically defended the linked ideas of a professional self-determined artistic practice that was built around individuality in expression. Said differently, Carr's argument detached art from social and gendered conventions to work instead with a definition of art that referred back either to itself or to metaphysical qualities like emotion and spirituality.

After 1927, Carr's work was increasingly drawn into the Canadian artistic field in two interrelated ways. First, the connections she made in 1927 as part of the *Canadian West Coast Art* exhibition included not simply members of the Group of Seven but other prominent individuals involved in building a Canadian artistic field. She renewed and deepened her acquaintance with Marius Barbeau and came to know Eric Brown, Director of the National Gallery.[46] In other words, she began to interact with individuals and institutions that shared her perspective on the arts, encouraged her, and could mobilize state and patron support for her work. She began to exhibit her work both nationally and internationally in a concerted way for the first time in her career. Assessed against this network, Carr found that the British Columbia arts scene paled in comparison. The response to works she exhibited in Victoria at the 1930 Island Arts and Crafts Exhibition, she reported to her friend Nan Cheney, was disappointing and symptomatic of broader local problems: "somehow I feel they just degrade Art and make it mean & little."[47]

Second, Carr's work became integrated into a national and, in some cases, international, art market. In 1931, for instance, she sent works to shows in Seattle and Baltimore and fielded requests to send work to a pan-Canadian exhibition organized by the National Gallery.[48] The effect was to increase Carr's interest in artistic matters in central Canada and to look for news "from East" from her correspondents that kept her up-dated on developments relating to artists and galleries in Ontario and Quebec.[49] Carr's interest in key Canadian art institutions demonstrates both their expanding scope and their importance to the westward expansion of the Canadian artistic field. In effect, its development drew Carr's work into a different set of social and market relations that both artistically sustained her and increased the circulation of her artwork beyond its local Victoria market. It was this expansion of her market that increasingly allowed Carr to move away from the occupational pluralism that had defined her working life in the arts from 1911 to 1927 and allowed her to devote more attention to creative pursuits.[50]

"Essentially Their Field": Emily Carr, Gender Relations, and the Arts

In the 1920s, Carr presented her aesthetic as genderless. She used masculine examples to illustrate her points (for example, the Group of Seven) and in

this she participated in one of the structural dynamics of the artistic field as it developed amongst women in Canada. Working with a supposedly genderless aesthetic built on metaphysical properties could make it difficult to ascribe gendered identities to artists; but it also proved difficult to escape the gendered norms of the wider society in which the artistic field was set. The connection between social and market values as they pertained to gender influenced the development of the artistic field, connecting, for example, the market value of women's art to conceptions of "pin money." The privileging of male cultural producers has also been noted by feminist art historians.[51] Equally importantly, for Carr, her working life occurred at a time when the artistic field was far from complete. This created a complex – and to Carr it later seemed unusual – series of gender relations within the arts.

Carr was committed to the idea of autonomous art from an early stage of her life. She did not simply try to take advantage of existing institutions but also helped to build them both in British Columbia and in her post-1927 connection to national networks. In 1908, she became a founding member of the British Columbia Society of Fine Arts, an organization that looked to "stimulate interest in art and hold exhibitions of a somewhat higher type than had been attempted before."[52] Years later, after she had moved back to Victoria, she led a similar venture that was designed to build a "people's gallery" for the community. Carr was its key advocate, hosting meetings and speaking on behalf of the project. In one talk on the subject, she referred to the proposed gallery as a "place for the spirit of art to grow." She believed that such a project held out positive benefits for the entire community because what she viewed as true art "touches all classes, all nationalities, all colours."[53] Said differently, true art was not bounded by human difference. It was precisely these ideas upon which the full development of an artistic field depended.

The art world in which Carr worked for most of her life was, however, different. Like other aspiring professional women artists of her time, Carr encountered overt, implicit, and institutional sexism that developed out of gendered social expectations. Her initial studies in San Francisco, for example, ended when her father's executor, who told her that she had "played at art" long enough, called her home.[54] While studying in England, Carr found that some male instructors had little time for women students, whom they viewed as hobbyists. Julius Olsson "favoured male students" and Frederick Reddens, according to one of Carr's biographers, "had not taken Emily's art seriously."[55] Carr later found similar attitudes among some members of the Group of Seven. Despite initially warm relations with A.Y. Jackson and his avowed commitment to a genderless aesthetic, Carr came to suspect that sexism stood behind his often-negative perception of her work.

"A.Y.J. wrote me the other day," she told her friend Nan Cheney in 1940, "I have always felt he resented me as a woman artist getting recognition."[56] From Carr's perspective what this meant was that some male artists could accept her as an acolyte but had trouble accepting her as an accomplished and honoured artist in her own right.

Carr responded to the sexism she encountered in different ways. One strategy was to be selective in her choice of art schools and instructors. Where possible, she seems to have looked for schools that afforded female students the same instructional opportunities as male students.[57] In another instance, she selected an instructor whom she did not find condescending toward women and who was willing to both critique her art from a professional perspective and encourage her individuality of expression.[58] The same objective led Carr to seek out the criticism and support of the leading arts figures and instructors she could find, as well as the fellowship of the most "progressive" students.[59] She explained her decision to study in France in exactly these terms. "Everyone said Paris was the top of art and I wanted to get the best teaching I knew."[60] Undoubtedly, this also led to her initial embrace of Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and her worries when she did not hear from him or others she held in high regard.[61]

Other strategies Carr deployed were to assert women's rights, to play a leadership role in the arts herself, and to seek out the company of women. When she helped establish the British Columbia Society of Fine Arts in 1908, Carr insisted that at least one woman be elected to the hanging committee.[62] For Carr, in fact, the need to demonstrate women's artistic abilities weighed on the way in which she conceptualized her own public image. She needed, she later concluded, to accept a greater level of publicity as a way to illustrate women's artistic abilities. This was difficult because Carr did not innately like public attention. She confided to her journal:

> I have dodged publicity, hated write-ups and all that splutter. Well, that's all selfish conceit that embarrassed me. I have been forgetting Canada and forgetting women painters. It's them I ought to be upholding . . . I am also glad that I am showing these men that women can hold up their end. The men resent a woman getting any honour in what they consider is essentially their field . . . So I have decided to stop squirming, to throw any honour in with Canada and women.[63]

According to Carr, gender played an important role in her deep friendship with Sophie Frank, a Stó:lō woman who lived on a reserve in North Vancouver. Carr met Frank when she called at Carr's studio selling baskets door to door. "Her love for me is *real*," Carr later wrote, "and mine for her.

There is a bond between us where color, creed, environment don't count. The woman in us meets on common ground and we love each other."[64] Carr also paid close attention to other women artists and, where possible, entertained women artists in her studio.[65] Carr's commitment to the company of women was also likely part of her long friendship and correspondence with Nan Cheney and she took special pride in invitations to professional women's societies and their recognition of her accomplishments.[66]

Carr's strategies were not always successful, however, and at times they produced ironic results. One effect of her commitment to the arts was that it could, in fact, distance her from women. Female companionship, Susan Butlin has suggested, was particularly important to the first generation of women artists striving for professional careers in a male-dominated field.[67] For Carr this was also true but there were limits to the degree to which she thrived on female artistic companionship, particularly if it conflicted with her conception of art. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the developing artistic field overlapped with the already existing social organization of the arts in a way that promoted periodically antagonistic relations with other women. While studying in England, for example, her biographers note, Carr's relations with other female students were often far from friendly.[68] From Carr's perspective, other female students were often not serious about art and were, instead, more interested in social graces and meeting men. She mocked one girl who came to class escorted by her chaperone and belittled female students who easily accepted the authority of male teachers simply because they were men.[69] As a teacher, she ran into the same conflict in Vancouver when asked to instruct what she referred to as a "Ladies Art Club." Carr viewed her students as dabblers more interested in what she saw as frivolity than in a serious commitment to their art. Carr condemned these "society women," as she called them, for tea drinking and chatter, precisely because they treated the arts as a form of refined leisure instead of a career. Ultimately, these competing conceptions of the arts – played out in Carr's class – were incompatible and the "Ladies Art Club" and Carr "parted company."[70]

There were also ambiguities in Carr's relations with men. While she had concerns about how male artists related to women, Carr found she could have remarkable respect for men, a point she noted in a letter she wrote to Ira Dilworth. "I find all my hoarded letters are from *men* – I was supposed to be a man-hater!! He, he! I learned more from men, touched them closer, [have] been touched deeper by them than by women – queer me."[71] Carr's ambiguity about gendered friendships pointed, for her, to other questions about gender relations. For example, she wondered about men who chose wives for their physical appearance as opposed to their talent. "What do *I* think of Mrs. D.C. Scott[?]," she wrote Dilworth. "Not much – very sweet to me – and mails

me *her poems*. I found neither her nor them thrilling. Why do men choose dolls?"[72] Carr was also confused by the way men characterized her work. When Ira Dilworth referred to her paintings as masculine, he may have meant it as a compliment. For Carr, it was a matter of confusion that she asked him to explain[73] because, from her artistic perspective, such characterizations had no place in the art world.

Conclusions

One of the dominant themes of Carr's life was loneliness. In her biography of the artist, Maria Tippett argues that Carr was unable to establish deep and long-lasting connections with other people because of a childhood trauma.[74] Elsewhere, Tippett also suggests that Carr may have exaggerated her isolation – and in the process transformed it into one of the key myths of her artistic life – because she wanted to identify with the ideal of a struggling artist.[75] Paula Blanchard has suggested that Carr's gender played a key role in her loneliness: she was a woman in a man's world.[76] Here, broader social dynamics may also have affected Carr. Like other professional female artists, Carr chose to remain single but, as Maria Tippett notes, the social life of Victoria was not organized for single women. Singles activities tended to cater to men, while women's clubs tended to be organized for and by married middle-class women.[77]

Other factors, too, tended to isolate Carr from her peers, and these not infrequently stemmed from the artist's own choices and her strategies for negotiating the artistic field. At times, for example, Carr found the company of children more rewarding than that of adults, a point she made in her public comments on art. As is well known she periodically adopted a child's persona – "Small" – in correspondence. Carr does not seem to have relished a career as a teacher, even though she appears to have been very successful in this regard.[78] What made children important to Carr, she later explained, was their lack of preconception about art, their willingness to experiment, and the degree to which they treated art as a form of personal expression. "Children grasp things more quickly than we do. They are more creative than grown-ups . . . When a child draws he does because he wants to express something. If he draws a house he never fails to make smoke pour out of the chimney. That moves, it is alive. He feels it."[79]

Carr found a similar experience in her interaction with First Nations. She found in Native culture something proud and majestic, animated by a deep appreciation of culture and history. In the totems of the northern North West coast, she believed she found fitting monuments to a people who had fully integrated art into their daily lives in a way that created a vital

aesthetic and spirituality.[80] As Gerta Moray has noted, Carr also found in Native cultures what she saw as a different, more woman-centric conception of female spiritual and cultural power.[81] On a personal level, Carr seemed to thrive when living and sketching in aboriginal communities. In some ways, Carr adhered to dominant white perspectives on First Nations as peoples whose cultural vitality had already been corrupted by commercialism and was, therefore, already a matter of history. But, this perspective was marked by contradictory tendencies where she felt at home and happy living and working outside white Canadian society.[82] It seemed to take her from the worries of her daily life that distracted her from artistic production.

A final factor to be considered in assessing Carr's loneliness is her use of geographic mobility as a strategy. In some ways Carr's life was not mobile. Unlike other women artists, she chose to stay in Canada instead of searching out a potentially more favourable overseas setting. Carr lived all her life in Victoria or Vancouver. Yet, within this geographic framework, she combined mobility with other strategies to advance her art. In 1905, after returning from England, she moved to Vancouver because of Victoria's limited arts scene. Vancouver offered a job teaching art, an arts association, and an exhibition society.[83] As a student, she frequently changed lodgings, instructors, and schools. And, she looked forward to sketching trips to northern British Columbia, where she could find inspiration among First Nations and their cultures. Even late in life, Carr's most creative and productive moments were lived away from home, isolated in the caravan that she caused to be moved around to various locales beyond the edges of Victoria's expanding urban footprint.

If such choices energized Carr and provided inspiration, they also contributed to her isolation. Above all, however, Carr explained her loneliness with reference to the arts. What upset her, she explained to Nan Cheney while living in Victoria, was the absence of true artists. "So I plod along by lonesome & often wish there were other interested spirits about."[84] She made the same point to Ruth Humphrey: "But of course Victoria is about the most sleepily behind spot on earth for Art."[85] There were people who sought out her company, but whom she found trying. Like other artists, for instance, she loathed critics and regularly referred to art criticism as rubbish.[86] Likewise, she had little time for socialites who, in her view, had mastered an art of "jargon" but knew little of creativity.[87] Her animosity toward critics and lay people may have been over-determined but it was a reaction that took place within the artistic field. Those whom she castigated were other voices that claimed to speak with authority about art and its quality. There can also be little doubt, as Paula Blanchard and Susan Butlin have argued, that professionalism in the arts demanded more of women than men.[88] For Carr

this was, in fact, one explanation she found for the connections she made to men. Women's domestic responsibilities prevented them from devoting full attention to the arts: "Women got so split up following the careers of their children and chasing 'round following their husbands: but men that have absorbed books & thoughts with other men & talked about deep things & planned life together have something firmer than a jelly-platform on which to sit down."[89]

But Carr also seems to have found it difficult to associate with women whose conception of art continued to be built around an earlier social organization of culture. She had, she once told Nan Cheney, a feeling of "dread" after deciding to attend a meeting of university women.[90] She never explained why, but the reasons were likely similar to those that led her to "part company" with the "society women" of the "Ladies Art Club." Perhaps because their conception of art so upset her, Carr simply found it easier to stay at home. There were other characteristics that Carr disliked about the art world. She disliked what she saw as its commercialism (something that detracted from the idea of pure art by according it a monetary value) and the degree to which art remained connected to elitist social pretentions. "Art," she wrote Ruth Humphrey, could be "terrible rot . . . The *now* Art is. Instead of being an outlet of expression it's an intake of flattery and dollars, grabbed for on the dead run."[91] In other words, Carr had problems with the continued interaction of the artistic field with the capitalist market.

Isolation stemmed from Carr's choices, but in itself it was not a strategy that Carr adopted to deal with the complicated gender relations of Canada's evolving artistic field. Her loneliness notwithstanding, she had visitors, an extensive correspondence, and a social life. What she felt she lacked was a community of like-minded artists with whom she could have a meeting of minds. This is, conversely, what she believed had given the Group of Seven its perseverance. For Carr, the development of a modern artistic field in Canada carried with it a variety of implications. It created complex public reactions to her art and to her as a woman. It also created an equally complicated system of gender relations. In interesting and important ways, Carr continues to attract a range of critical and creative attention.[92] Undoubtedly, her continued appeal relates to a variety of factors. One reason that Carr might attract attention, however, is the historical and social situation of her life and what it tells us about the complicated evolving relationship between the arts and gender in modern Canada, the emotional investment this entailed, the potential triumphs of an artistic career, and the complex interactions it mandated for women.

The questions and ambiguities that Carr found in her own life were not easily resolved, in large measure because they were woven into the

development of an artistic field in Canada. These tensions, in fact, persisted after Carr's death. The character of the Canadian artistic field ensured that other women artists continued to address similar challenges over time. The way in which the Canadian artistic field interacted with the wider society and its gender-specific social expectations did not easily allow the field to generate the gender-neutral artistic habitus it promised. One of the advantages of this concept is that it allows art historians to explore the evolving nature of gender relations in the arts from a different vantage point. In the case of Carr, a focus on the gendered dynamics of the artistic field allows us to capture both its importance to women like Carr and the gendered dilemmas it carried with it. It helps to show how art institutions functioned to promote distinct and specific forms of artistic practice that were related to, but at the same time sought independence from, society and the values it maintained. A consideration of women artists like Carr shows how gender was embedded in and fundamental to this process. Put differently, gendering the artistic field deepens an understanding of the historical sociology of art in Canada. It provides a framework within which to explore the tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions its development created.

NOTES

1 Maria TIPPETT, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1979), 145; Janice STEWART, "Cultural Appropriation and Identificatory Practice in Emily Carr's 'Indian Stories'," *Frontiers* 26:2 (2005): 66; Doris SHADBOLT, *The Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979). Chapter 4 refers to 1927 as "the turning point."
2 Emily CARR, *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 658–59.
3 Ibid., 657.
4 Randal JOHNSON, "Editor's Introduction," in Pierre BOURDIEU, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
5 Anne WHITELAW, "Art Institutions in the Twentieth Century: Framing Canadian Visual Culture," in *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.
6 Pierre BOURDIEU, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), ch. 4.
7 Ibid., chs. 1 and 5; BOURDIEU, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ch. 3.
8 Pierre BOURDIEU, "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," *International Social Science Journal* 20 (Winter 1968): 589–612.
9 BOURDIEU, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 29.
10 Ian McKAY, "Historians, Anthropology, and the Concept of Culture," *Labour/Le Travail* 8:9 (Autumn 1981–Spring 1982): 185–241.

11 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 437.
12 Ibid., ch. 7.
13 Kristina Huneault, "Professionalism as Critical Concept and Historical Process for Women and Art in Canada," in *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850–1970*, ed. Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press), 3–52; Susan Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts: A History of the Professionalization of Canadian Women Artists, 1880–1914" (PhD thesis., Carleton University, 2008).
14 Charles R. Tuttle, *The Comprehensive History of the Dominion of Canada* (Montreal: H.B. Bigney, 1879), 467.
15 Marylin McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500–1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).
16 The Marquis of Lorne, *Memories of Canada and Scotland: Speeches and Verses* (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1884), 217–18.
17 Henry J. Morgan, *The Dominion Annual Register and Review for the Thirteenth Year of the Canadian Union 1879* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1880), 289; Harriet Ford, "The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts," *Canadian Magazine* 3:1 (May 1894): 47; National Council of Women, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (Toronto: National Council of Women of Canada, 1900), 210, stated bluntly "Canada is still largely in a state of tutelage" with regard to the arts.
18 Maud C. Cooke, *Social Etiquette, or Manners and Customs of Polite Society* (London, ON: McDermid & Logan, 1896), 489–91.
19 *The Ladies Book of Useful Information Compiled from Many Sources* (London, ON, 1896), 10.
20 *Calendar of the Church School for Girls, Windsor Nova Scotia, 1897–98 Seventh Year* (sl, sn, [1897]), 3.
21 Ibid., 15–16, 27 and 37.
22 *Educational Establishment for Young Ladies, Congregation de Notre Dame* (Ottawa: Citizen Printing and Publishing Company, 1883), 6.
23 K.A. Finlay, *"A Woman's Place": Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, B.C., 1850s–1920s* (Victoria, BC: Maltwood Press Museum and Gallery and the University of Victoria, 2004), 20 and 43; Margaret Milne Martens and Graeme Chalmers, "Educating the Eye, Hand, and Heart at St. Ann's Academy: A Case Study of Art Education for Girls in Nineteenth-Century Victoria," *BC Studies* 144 (Winter 2004/2005): 31–59.
24 Ellen Easton McLeod, *In Good Hands: The Women of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1999), 5.
25 Conrad Graham, "Cornelius Kreighoff and the Shakespeare Club," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 24 (2003): 46–59.
26 "Art Notes: The Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy," *Arion* 1:11 (August 1881): 84–85; *Novascotian*, 9 Feb. 1837; *Novascotian*, 23 Aug. 1838; and J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 409.
27 McLeod, *In Good Hands*, 5.
28 Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1871), 458–59.
29 Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts"; Finlay, *"A Woman's Place,"* 47, 50.
30 Whitelaw, "Art Institutions in the Twentieth Century," 3–5; Marquis of Lorne, *Memories of Canada and Scotland*, 217.

31 Referred to by Carr as "the East."
32 Cited in Evelyn Walters, *The Women of Beaver Hall: Canadian Modernist Painters* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2005), 11.
33 Cited in ibid., 49.
34 Mary Ella Dignam, "Development of Art," in National Council of Women, *Women of Canada*, 214.
35 The dynamics of art appreciation in society, in fact, remained a matter of concern to artists and critics through the interwar period. For examples, see Walter Abell, "Jack Humphrey – Painter," *Canadian Forum* 16:185 (June 1936): 16–17; Walter Abell, "Looking Back on Art Week," *Maritime Art* 1:3 (February 1941): 3–6; Marius Barbeau, "Quebec Wood Carvers," *Dalhousie Review* 12:2 (July 1932): 181–91.
36 Leslie Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 25–77, 90, 168–71, and 175.
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38 Cited in Huneault, "Professionalism as Critical Concept and Historical Process for Women and Art in Canada," 51, n. 115.
39 Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts."
40 Tippett, *Emily Carr.*
41 Emily Carr to Humphrey Toms, 16 Feb. 1941, in Doreen Walker, ed., *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr, Nan Cheney, and Humphrey Toms* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 298.
42 Emily Carr to Nan Cheney, 9 Sept. 1937, in ibid., 47.
43 Emily Carr, *Fresh Seeing: Two Addresses by Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1972), 10.
44 Ibid., 11 and 27.
45 Ibid., 16 and 22.
46 Carr, *Complete Writings*, 659.
47 Carr to Cheney, 11 Nov. 1930, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 3.
48 Carr to Cheney, 11 Jan. 1931 and Carr to Cheney, 14 Dec. 1931 in ibid., 7 and 9–10.
49 Nan Cheney to Eric Brown, 16 Apr. 1937; Eric Brown to Nancy Cheney, 27 Apr. 1937; Carr to Cheney, 13 June 1937, in ibid., 39, 41 and 44.
50 This is not to say that monetary issues did not affect Carr throughout her life. It is to suggest that her ability to sell more work allowed her to reorganize her time by lessening the work she needed to do to make ends meet outside of creative production.
51 Alena Buis, "'A Story of Struggle and Splendid Courage': Anne Savage's CBC Broadcasts of *The Development of Canadian Art*," in Huneault and Anderson, *Rethinking Professionalism*, ch. 4.
52 Cited in Paula Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987), 106.
53 Emily Carr, "A People's Gallery," in *Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journals of Emily Carr and Other Writings,* ed. Susan Crean (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003), 205.
54 Cited in Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 25.

55 Ibid., 53.
56 Carr to Cheney, 6 Feb. 1940, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 216.
57 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 18.
58 Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr*, 88.
59 Ibid., 80.
60 Cited in Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 81.
61 Carr to Cheney, 14 Dec. 1931, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 9–10.
62 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 76.
63 Cited in Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr*, 193.
64 Cited in Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr*, 108.
65 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 76.
66 Emily Carr to [Ruth Humphrey], postmarked 17 May 1937, in "Letters from Emily Carr," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 41:2 (Winter 1972): 94.
67 Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts," 207.
68 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 55.
69 Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr*, 89.
70 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 68.
71 Emily Carr to Ira Dilworth, 6 Apr. 1942, cited in Linda M. Morra, ed., *Corresponding Influence: Selected Letters of Emily Carr and Ira Dilworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 142.
72 Carr to Dilworth, 28–29 Jan. 1942, in Morra, *Corresponding Influence*, 104.
73 Carr to Dilworth, 14 Feb. [1942], in ibid., 107.
74 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 14.
75 Maria Tippett, "'A Paste Solitaire in a Steel Claw Setting': Emily Carr and her Public," *bc Studies* 20 (Winter 1973–74): 3–14.
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78 Ibid., 71.
79 Carr, *Fresh Seeing*, 9.
80 Emily Carr, "Lecture on Totems," in Crean, *Opposite Contraries*, 177–203.
81 Gerta Moray, "'T'Other Emily': Emily Carr, the Modern Woman Artist and the Dilemmas of Gender," *racar* 26:1–2 (1999): 73–90.
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83 Tippett, *Emily Carr*, 67.
84 Carr to Cheney, 25 Oct. 1935, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 29.
85 Carr to Humphrey, 13 Feb. [1938], in "Letters from Emily Carr," 121.
86 Carr to Cheney, 2 Feb. 1941, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 293.
87 Carr to Humphrey, 27 May 1937, in "Letters from Emily Carr," 98.
88 Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr*, 83; Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts."
89 Carr to Dilworth, 15 Feb. 1942, in Morra, *Corresponding Influence*, 113.
90 Carr to Cheney, 5 May 1938, in Walker, *Dear Nan*, 79.
91 Carr to Humphrey, 13 Feb. [1938], in "Letters from Emily Carr," 121.
92 Sherrill Grace, "From Emily Carr to Joy Coghill . . . and Back: Writing the Self," in *Song of this Place*" *bc Studies* 137 (Spring 2003): 109–30; Eva-Marie Kröller, "Literary Versions of Emily Carr," *Canadian Literature* 109 (Summer 1986): 87–98.

La différence sexuelle dans le champ artistique

ANDREW NURSE

RÉSUMÉ

La trajectoire de la carrière artistique d'Emily Carr (1871–1945) fournit une étude de cas intéressante sur l'évolution du domaine artistique moderne canadien marqué par la présence des femmes. Selon Pierre Bourdieu, un champ artistique est un système semi-autonome de relations économiques et culturelles qui privilégie à la fois le capital financier et l'esthétique comme monnaie et autorité. Il se développe dans une relation de dialogue avec les processus socio-économiques pris dans leur ensemble, auxquels il est à la fois détaché et rattaché, créant ainsi une tension dynamique particulière. Ceux qui fonctionnent à l'intérieur de ce champ cherchent à affirmer leur autorité, mais sont attirés vers des modèles sociaux plus larges. Notre dissertation soutient que l'évolution du champ artistique dans le Canada moderne a engendré de nouveaux systèmes de relations entre les femmes et les hommes et des tensions dues à ses particularités structurelles, aux anciennes conceptions relatives aux femmes dans les arts, et aux normes sociales « genrées » dans leur ensemble. La carrière bien documentée d'Emily Carr illustre comment les artistes féminines ont vécu ce développement et les difficultés artistiques et sociales qui s'ensuivirent.

Divers mouvements ont contribué à l'essor du champ artistique moderne au Canada, notamment le patronage d'État, le nationalisme dans les arts, les nouveaux courants esthétiques et la dynamique des marchés de l'art en pleine mutation, pour ne citer que ceux-là. La croissance du champ artistique moderne a offert aux femmes des débouchés professionnels qui, selon des artistes comme Carr, leur manquaient auparavant. La carrière de Carr dans les arts s'est déroulée à une époque de transition incomplète dans l'organisation sociale des arts. En effet, le monde artistique dans lequel elle avait d'abord grandi fonctionnait selon une logique différente. Celle-ci établissait des relations avec les arts spécifiquement fondées sur la classe et le sexe, et définies par deux caractéristiques. La première, pour les filles et femmes de la classe moyenne et de la haute société, les arts étaient d'importants mécanismes de raffinement marquant la position sociale des femmes. La seconde, les femmes artistes occupaient une place tertiaire sur les marchés de l'art, à la traîne de l'art européen et des artistes canadiens masculins. En

d'autres mots, pour les femmes, l'art était censé être un loisir symbolisant le raffinement et la grâce sociale d'une élite.

Carr n'était pas la seule à lutter, d'une part, avec ses aspirations artistiques et professionnelles, et d'autre part, avec le bouleversement de l'organisation sociale des arts au Canada. À sa manière, elle a contribué au développement du champ artistique moderne au Canada à la fois par ses actions – ses efforts pour consolider sa carrière d'artiste – et par son idéologie. Dans ses déclarations publiques sur les arts, Carr évitait les considérations dogmatiques en « isme » et la représentation réaliste. Elle se concentrait plutôt sur ce qu'elle conceptualisait comme la créativité d'une expression personnelle et spirituelle qui rejetait la représentation stéréotypée en faveur de sensations émotionnelles et visuelles. Ainsi, la perspective de Carr détachait l'art de toute conception d'une esthétique intégrée dans la société pour se concentrer sur ses propriétés visuelles innovatrices, ou sur ce qu'elle appelait un « nouveau regard ».

Sur le plan social, sa quête d'autonomie dans les arts l'a engagée dans la cause des relations hommes-femmes en pleine mutation, point qu'elle avait d'ailleurs non seulement reconnu et discuté dans sa correspondance, mais aussi noté dans ses journaux. L'évolution du champ artistique a entraîné deux niveaux de tensions différents. Tout d'abord, son engagement à mener une carrière professionnalisée au sein d'un champ artistique a suscité des tensions auprès des femmes. Celles-ci fonctionnaient en effet selon une ancienne conception qui confinait les arts au loisir d'une élite raffinée. D'ailleurs, son ancienne carrière d'enseignante à Vancouver et les problèmes vécus dans le cours d'arts qu'elle donnait aux femmes illustrent bien ce point. Emily Carr était frustrée par ce cours qu'elle surnommait le « Ladies Art Club », précisément parce qu'elle ne croyait pas que ses étudiantes prenaient le processus de création au sérieux, mais considéraient plutôt l'art comme un passe-temps. Au fil de sa carrière, Carr a aussi été blessée par le sexisme de la société canadienne et le refus de certains artistes masculins d'accepter les femmes comme leurs égales.

Carr a abordé la complexité de la question de la différence homme-femme de diverses manières. En commun avec d'autres femmes artistes de son temps, elle a utilisé la mobilité, en quête d'instructeurs bienveillants pour l'aider à développer son art. Étudiante, elle recherchait la compagnie d'autres élèves « progressistes », entretenait une correspondance nourrie avec des hommes qui partageaient ses idées, et pensait à contribuer à l'essor institutionnel de l'art. En tant qu'artiste, Carr se sent par ailleurs attirée par les paysages et les cultures des régions rurales de la Colombie-Britannique et des Premières Nations, ce qui sortait du courant dominant de la société canadienne. Comme l'a fait remarquer Gerta Moray, Carr a découvert dans la

culture des Premières Nations une fierté et une majesté qui apportaient une conception différente de la spiritualité féminine, plus centrée sur la femme. Elle a trouvé aussi des amitiés intimes avec les femmes, comme celle qu'elle partageait avec Sophie Frank – émotionnellement forte et durable.

Il n'est pas facile de caractériser la dynamique homme-femme des relations personnelles et artistiques de Carr qui, d'ailleurs, les trouvait aussi parfois confuses. En fait, elle en était venue à croire que cette différence sexuelle courante à cette époque au Canada était la cause de la difficulté des femmes à devenir artistes. Leurs rôles de femmes et d'épouses, affirmait-elle, divisaient leur temps et nuisaient à la concentration nécessaire à la poursuite de démarches professionnelles, intellectuelles et culturelles. Elle s'interrogeait aussi sur sa réputation soi-disant de « femme qui détestait les hommes », alors qu'elle avait été profondément touchée par des hommes qu'elle avait connus et avec qui elle partageait une communauté d'intérêts artistiques.

De nombreux commentateurs se sont penchés sur la perception qu'avait Carr de son propre isolement et de la solitude ainsi engendrée, question importante pour une artiste d'envergure et élément caractéristique de sa carrière artistique. À notre avis, son sentiment d'isolement pourrait être compris, d'un côté, comme un produit de sa situation géographique à la périphérie d'un champ artistique en pleine évolution au Canada et, de l'autre, comme un aspect de la dynamique homme-femme de ce champ dans les premières décennies du XXe siècle. Comme Emily Carr l'a elle-même souligné, il lui manquait une communauté d'artistes partageant ses vues et poursuivant les mêmes objectifs, disons, à la manière du Groupe des Sept. À l'époque et à l'endroit où elle travaillait, il lui était difficile de trouver cette communauté, et le fait d'être femme exigeait qu'elle transige constamment avec la dynamique en pleine mutation des relations hommes-femmes dans l'art et la société.