

a View from the Atlantic

History, it has often been said, is a tale told by winners. Of course, these days, we're more sensitive to airing many sides of many stories. Nevertheless, history is still as much a point of view as it is a factual reflection of the full complexity of actual events.

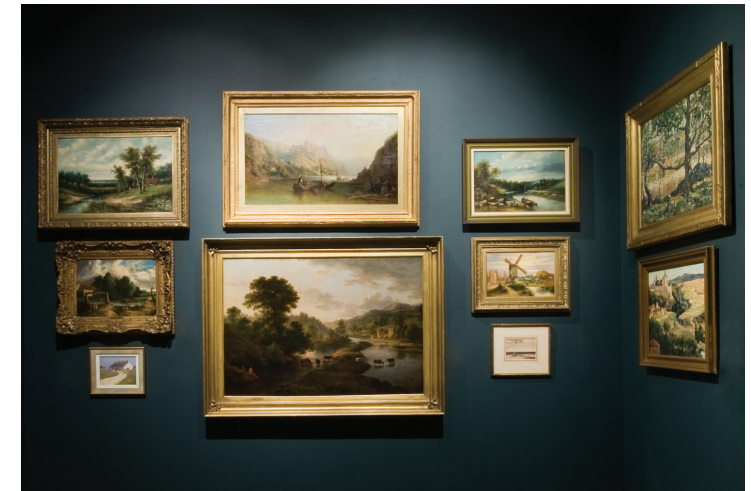
Art history, therefore, must reflect various points of view as much as it does any objective listing of facts. The subjective, the opinion of the historian and the context of the society within which the historian works, is inescapable. Thus Canadian art history has, for the past several decades at least, reflected a particular point of view about art in this country, one, frankly, which is solidly based in Ontario and Quebec. The importance of the Group of Seven or The Painters 11, of Les Automatistes or Les Plasticiens is not in doubt. However, other parts of the country have histories too, and our stories have not been sufficiently told.

Nova Scotia's art history dates back at least as far as that of Quebec and predates the art history (at least in terms of European forms) of any other part of the country. The re-hang of the Third Floor of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the largest permanent collection exhibition in our gallery in several years, presents an in-depth history of Canadian art with a distinct Nova Scotian accent. *a View From Atlantic* presents an historical take with an eastern edge – one that puts our stories into the larger history of art in this country.

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, of course, is a relative newcomer to this historical story, as we were created by an Act of the Nova Scotia Legislature in 1975. No one knows when the first Europeans ventured into Atlantic Canada, though Norse peoples were undoubtedly living in Newfoundland around 1000 AD and the Basques had been fishing the Grand Banks for hundreds of years by the time Columbus “discovered” North America. Port Royal was settled by the French in 1605. Halifax was founded by the British in 1749. The Mi'kmaw, Maliseet and Innu peoples have been here from time immemorial. Thirty-four years is but a blip in such a span of time. Fortunately, our collections, and our collecting history, predate our incorporation. In fact, it was with the creation of the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts Society in 1908 that our collecting history really began, and the works in our collection range from the 16th century to the 21st.

This chronological survey of Canadian art from our collection is both an end point and a beginning. It is the end of a long period of research by my colleagues in the Curatorial area, and it is also the beginning of what I expect will be a rousing and invigorating discussion. What works are displayed in a museum, what story is told, and, most important, what is omitted, reflects opinions. Opinions, of course, change. This is a permanent re-hang, in that we will not be returning to displaying temporary exhibitions in these spaces. However, it is subject to revision, to scholarly debate, and to the ongoing growth of our permanent collection.

History is a living, breathing story when well told. In *a View From Atlantic*, who we are, where we've come from, and even where we are going, is on display for diverse audiences to enjoy, to discuss, to interpret, even to dispute. Every visitor will be invited to build their own point of view, and will be provided with support material and ongoing public programs to ensure a lively and informative experience. The art of Nova Scotia, of Atlantic Canada, belongs prominently in Canada's history, as is made clear in this exciting re-hang of our permanent collection.



Installation view of the exhibition *a View from the Atlantic*, now featured on the Gallery's Third Floor.



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This is a true collaborative effort, and so I would like to thank the Gallery's curatorial team, each of whom worked on one or more rooms in this exciting project. This is not meant to be perfect, or even a definitive view of Atlantic Canada's place in art history. Rather, it is the beginning of what I hope will be a long and fruitful discussion.

Ray Cronin
Director and CEO