

A stylized, monochromatic illustration in shades of brown and black. It depicts a diver in silhouette, positioned in the center, with a scuba tank and regulator extending from the top left towards the diver. Below the diver, there are wavy lines representing water. The overall style is graphic and minimalist.

MARITIME ART

Canada's First Art Magazine, 1940-43

RITIME

National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives
8 January - 2 May 2003

THE MARITIME ART ASSOCIATION BEGAN PUBLISHING *MARITIME ART* IN OCTOBER 1940. IT WAS THE FIRST CANADIAN PERIODICAL TO BE ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO THE VISUAL ARTS AND TO PROVIDE NATIONAL COVERAGE.¹ A TOTAL OF 15 ISSUES WERE PRINTED, IN ENGLISH ONLY, BETWEEN 1940 AND 1943. THIS EXHIBITION INCLUDES EVERY ISSUE OF *MARITIME ART*.

A CO-OPERATIVE EFFORT

Walter Abell was the most significant contributor to both the Maritime Art Association and the journal *Maritime Art*. He not only planned and initiated the establishment of the Association, but was also the founding President and later the Editor of *Maritime Art*. An American by birth, in 1928 Abell came to Canada under the sponsorship of the Carnegie Corporation to become Acadia University's first Professor of Art & Aesthetics.²

In 1934, under the financial strains of the Depression, Abell was given a Carnegie grant to allow him to carry out a survey of the cultural needs of the region and devise a plan on how to meet those needs.³ His study found that although there were cultural organizations and art departments in the Maritimes, not one was adequately funded and each was operating with little or no communication beyond its immediate surroundings. (The Carnegie Corporation had already attempted to remedy this problem in 1922, by offering major financial assistance for an amalgamation of all Maritime universities and colleges at Halifax. This plan was rejected, but many smaller grants were made for specific uses,⁴ including Abell's appointment, which was the first of its kind in Canada.) Abell proposed the establishment of a Maritime art association and began by writing to the National Gallery of Canada for advice.⁵ The Assistant Director, Harry Orr McCurry, was fully supportive and indicated that the founding of such an association would mean that exhibitions from the National Gallery could travel through the Maritimes on a more regular basis.⁶ Citing this support, and with the co-signature of Elizabeth MacCleod, Director of the Art Department at Mount Allison University, Abell sent proposals to various art galleries, clubs and teaching departments all over the Maritimes.⁷ The responses were enthusiastic and led to a productive two-day meeting held in Saint John, New Brunswick in the spring of 1935. This was the founding meeting of the Maritime Art Association and the first of many co-operative efforts by all members. The goals of the Association were to improve communications, share resources, organize art lectures and circulate exhibitions around the Maritimes.⁸ Five years later, the Maritime Art Association began publishing *Maritime Art*.

CHECKLIST

Unless stated otherwise, each item is an issue of *Maritime Art*. All items are from the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

1. Letter dated 1 October 1940 from Walter Abell to H.O. McCurry. This letter announces the publication of *Maritime Art* and documents the early co-operation of the National Gallery of Canada.
2. Undated photograph of Walter Abell, Editor of *Maritime Art*.
3. Volume 1, Nos. 1-5, 1940-41. The format of Volume 1 reveals the co-operative effort used to begin publishing *Maritime Art*. The cover was designed by students of Violet Gillett in the Art Department of the Saint John Vocational School, while the text was mimeographed by students of Vye MacPherson at Acadia University.
4. Volume 1, No. 1, October 1940. The verso of the front cover lists the charter members of the Maritime Art Association, as well as members of the executive committee. Readers were urged by Abell to overlook the humble mimeographed format and to judge the magazine for its content.
5. Volume 1, No. 3, February 1941. The "Elsewhere in Canada" column made *Maritime Art* unique. No previous Canadian periodical had ever been entirely devoted to art while providing coverage of art news from across the country.
6. "The Covered Bridge," linocut by Gwendolyn Hales, original art supplement to Volume 1, No. 3, February 1941. The prints included in Volume 1 were contributed by artists working in the Maritimes. After Volume 2, art supplements from Canadian artists working outside the Maritimes began to appear.
7. "Market Slip, Saint John," wood engraving by Violet Gillett, original art supplement to Volume 1, No. 4, April 1941. As seen here, each supplement in Volume 1 depicted scenery closely associated with the Maritime provinces. Violet Gillett was an active member of the Maritime Art Association and a respected art teacher at the Saint John Vocational School.
8. "June in Bear River," silk-screen print by LeRoy Zwicker, original art supplement to Volume 1, No. 5, June 1941. LeRoy Zwicker was a graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and was associated with *Maritime Art* in numerous ways. In addition to contributing this art supplement, he also wrote an article on Halifax collections in Volume 1, No. 4.
9. Volume 2, Nos. 1-5, 1941-42. In 1941, LeRoy Zwicker became the journal's business manager and designed the cover of Volume 2, No. 1.
10. Volume 2, No. 1, October-November 1941. "Canadian Artists' Conference Number." Following the Conference of Canadian Artists held in Kingston in June 1941, *Maritime Art* began to take on an increasingly national outlook. This is evident not only from the adoption of its subtitle, "A Canadian Art Magazine," but also from the subscription form and editorial comment shown here. (Note: A typing error in the top left-hand corner of page 3 identifies this as No. 2: it is, however, No. 1.)
11. Volume 3, No. 1, October-November 1942. Front cover illustration of "Surprise Flight," by Felix Shea.
12. "Good Fighting Evil," linocut by Fritz Brandtner, original art supplement to Volume 2, No. 3, February 1942. In this special "Canada at War" issue, Abell paired Brandtner's dramatic image with a strong argument to support a government-sponsored war art program.

13. "Rubber Plant," wood engraving by Carl Schaefer, original art supplement to Volume 2, No. 4, April 1942.
14. Volume 2, No. 4, April 1942. "Editorial Comments: Criticism," by Walter Abell. This article highlighted the need for serious art criticism in Canada and affirmed the role of *Maritime Art* in meeting that need.
15. Volume 3, No. 2, December–January 1942–43. Front cover illustration of "Herald Angels," by Bertram Brooker. This reproduction identified this issue as a holiday issue, while the subheadings confirmed the magazine's sustained interest in war art.
16. Volume 2, No. 5, June–July 1942. "Art in Action," by Kathleen Shackleton. The *Maritime Art* Association's annual convention was bustling with activity in 1942. This article provided a lively account of the event, complete with photographs.
17. Volume 3, No. 3, February–March 1943. Front cover illustration of "Rapids at Night," by Thoreau MacDonald.
18. "Gulls," woodblock print by Edwin Holgate, original art supplement to Volume 3, No. 1, October–November 1942. Edwin Holgate made the final selections and provided critical commentary for travelling exhibitions of Maritime art organized by the Association.
19. "Prairie Serenade," linocut by Henry G. Glyde, A.R.C.A., original art supplement to Volume 3, No. 4, April–May 1943.
20. Volume 3, No. 5, July–August 1943 (the final issue). Front cover illustration of "Swordfishing Boats, Louisburg, N.S.," by Dorothy Wilson.
21. "Portrait," linocut by Christian McKiel, original art supplement to Volume 3, No. 5, July–August 1943. Opposite McKiel's supplement was an announcement by Abell that *Maritime Art* would soon become *Canadian Art*.
22. "Maritime Art: Report of the Editor for the Year 1942–1943," by Walter Abell.
23. *Canadian Art*, Volume 1, No. 1, October–November 1943.

NOTES

- 1 Charles C. Hill. *Canadian Painting in the Thirties*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975, p. 97.
- 2 Karen Herring. "Creating a Centre/Recreating the Margin: Ted Campbell and his Studio, Saint John, New Brunswick, in the 1930s and 40s." M.A. Thesis: Carleton University, 1993, p. 30.
- 3 Stephen H. Stackpole. *Carnegie Corporation Commonwealth Program, 1911–1961*. New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1963, p. 39.
- 4 See Robert M. Lester. *Review of Grants in The Maritime Provinces of Canada and in Newfoundland, 1911–1933: No. 15, Carnegie Corporation of New York Review Series*. New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1934.
- 5 Walter Abell to H.O. McCurry, 20 October 1934. National Gallery of Canada Archives, NGC fonds, file 5.11M.
- 6 H.O. McCurry to Walter Abell, 2 November 1934. National Gallery of Canada Archives, NGC fonds, file 5.11M.
- 7 See Walter Abell to C.C. Jones, 10 November 1934. University of New Brunswick, Archives and Special Collections Department, Harriet Irving Library, President's Papers (1930–50).
- 8 Walter Abell. "Co-operative Art in the Maritimes," *Saturday Night*, 12 June 1937, p. 7.
- 9 Walter Abell. "Editorial Comment: To Be Creative," *Maritime Art*, Volume 1, No. 1, October–November 1940, p. 4.
- 10 See Julia Scalzo. "Walter Abell: From *Maritime Art* to *Canadian Art*," *Vanguard*, Volume 16, No. 1, February–March 1987, p. 20–23.
- 11 See also Stuart A. Smith, "Saint John Painting of the 1930s," in Margaret Fancy, ed., *The Proceedings of the Art and Music in New Brunswick Symposium, Mount Allison University* [1984]. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 1987, p. 78.
- 12 For examples, see National Gallery of Canada Archives, NGC fonds, file 7.4M.
- 13 For an example, see Pegi N. MacLeod to Jack Humphrey, undated letter. National Gallery of Canada Archives, Jack Humphrey fonds, file MacLeod, Pegi N.

STIMULATING CREATIVITY

Abell's inaugural editorial comment set high aspirations for the publication to act as a "creative stimulus."⁹ He urged readers to assess the content of the journal and to overlook its humble appearance (to keep production costs low, the text was typed and mimeographed by students at Acadia University). Far more than just a news bulletin, *Maritime Art* printed articles on individual artists, artists' statements, reviews of art books, reproductions, exhibition commentaries and national art news updates. Every issue of *Maritime Art* also included an original art supplement (an actual print was inserted into each copy). The premier editorial comment cited this as a means of encouraging a modest local art market and challenging the idea that original works of art were luxury items for the rich. The journal promoted a broad definition of art and emphasized its importance in the daily lives of Canadians. As noted by the historian Julia Scalzo, direct parallels can be drawn between Abell's personal ideas on the social responsibilities of art and the populist image conveyed by *Maritime Art*.¹⁰

MARITIME ART/CANADIAN ART

At the 1940 Maritime Art Association's annual meeting, members initially conceived *Maritime Art* as a bulletin of local news (inspired by museum newsletters). However, the newly appointed Editor, Walter Abell, recognized the need for a serious art journal in Canada and ambitiously prepared the first issue with this in mind. He expanded the scope to include coverage of national art news and sought out potential contributors. These efforts were soon recognized and *Maritime Art* drew praise from the popular press, as well as a growing number of subscribers (including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and other prestigious art research libraries).

The transformation of *Maritime Art* from a regional to a national publication was greatly effected by the Conference of Canadian Artists held at Queen's University in June 1941.¹¹ Abell gave a lecture entitled "Art and Democracy" and was an active participant throughout the conference. Upon returning home, he added the subtitle "A Canadian Art Magazine" to *Maritime Art*, devoting an entire issue to the conference proceedings. A more sophisticated format was adopted with unique cover designs for each issue and a professional printing format. Abell wrote regularly to McCurry at the National Gallery, asking for support to officially transform *Maritime Art* into a national magazine.¹² Eventually, amid much local resentment in the Maritimes,¹³ his efforts met with success and *Maritime Art* became *Canadian Art*. The first issue with the new title was dated October–November 1943. Abell moved to Ottawa with the magazine and continued as Editor until eventually returning to the United States to resume teaching.

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