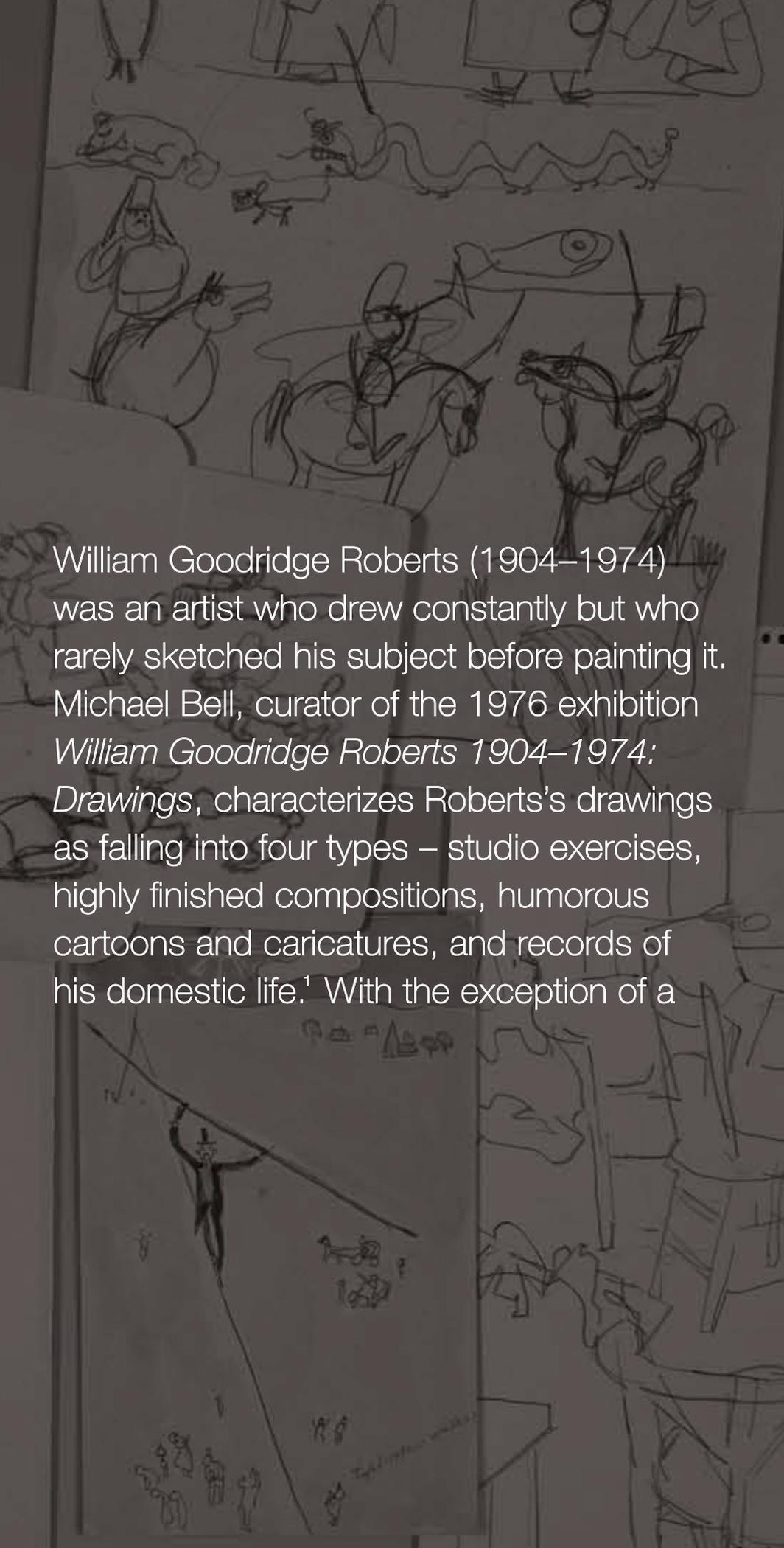


Goodridge Roberts

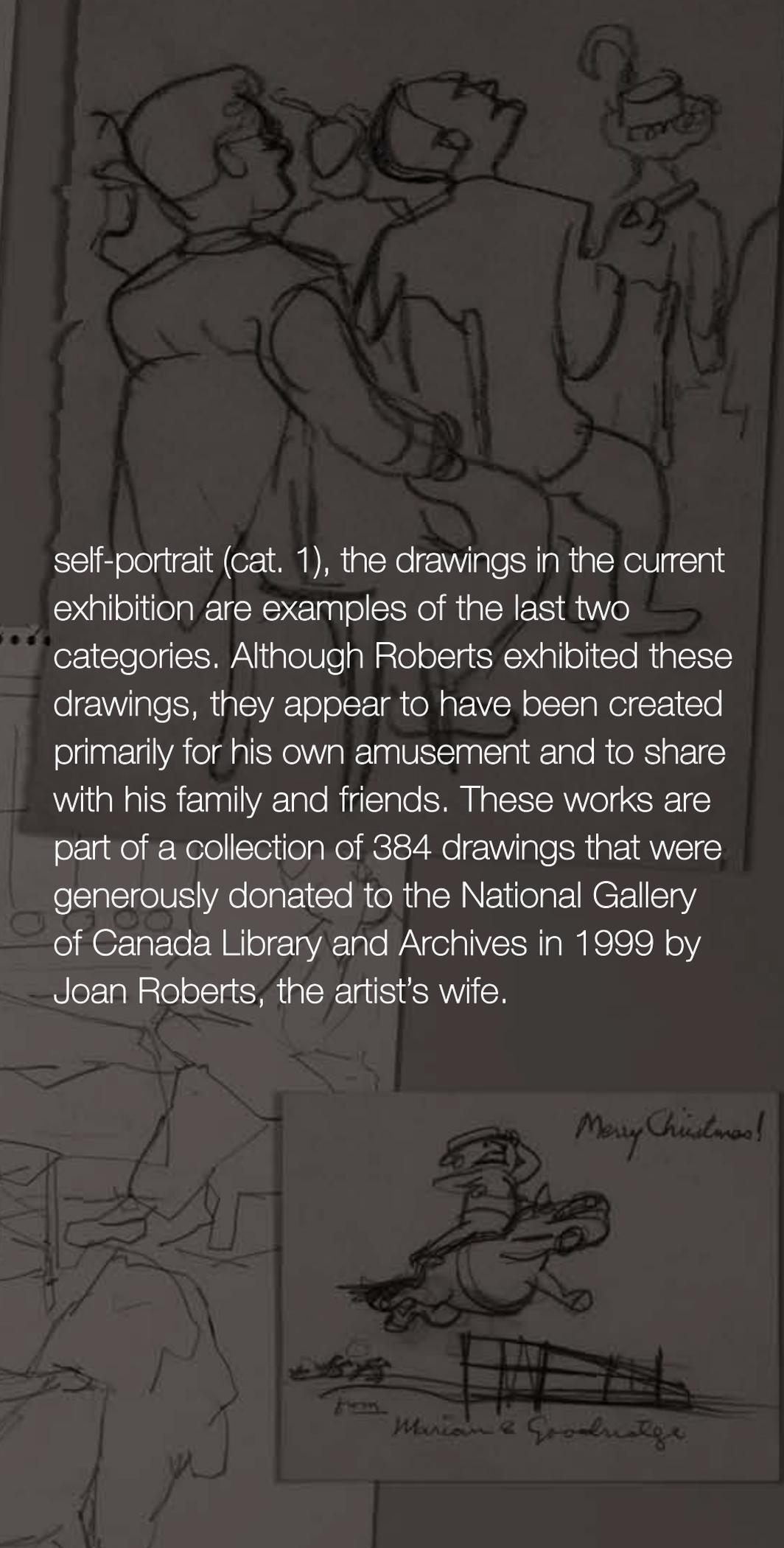
Drawings, Caricatures, Cartoons

National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

14 January – 24 April 2009

The background of the image is a collage of various sketches by William Goodridge Roberts. At the top, there are several figures, some appearing to be in motion or falling. Below that, a prominent sketch shows a figure on a horse, with another figure on a horse to the right. A large, stylized fish is drawn above the horses. In the lower left, a figure is shown hanging from a diagonal line. The sketches are rendered in simple, expressive line work, characteristic of Roberts' style.

William Goodridge Roberts (1904–1974) was an artist who drew constantly but who rarely sketched his subject before painting it. Michael Bell, curator of the 1976 exhibition *William Goodridge Roberts 1904–1974: Drawings*, characterizes Roberts's drawings as falling into four types – studio exercises, highly finished compositions, humorous cartoons and caricatures, and records of his domestic life.¹ With the exception of a



self-portrait (cat. 1), the drawings in the current exhibition are examples of the last two categories. Although Roberts exhibited these drawings, they appear to have been created primarily for his own amusement and to share with his family and friends. These works are part of a collection of 384 drawings that were generously donated to the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives in 1999 by Joan Roberts, the artist's wife.



Goodridge Roberts's interest in the visual arts began at a young age. In his 1953 essay, "From this Point I Looked Out," he recounts an early memory of walking in Kensington Gardens when he was living in London, England, with his parents at the age of about ten. Roberts suddenly became aware of the beauty and wonder of his environment, describing this experience as a sensation of identification with his surroundings. Filled with happiness, he felt a desire to express this affinity through art, and, soon afterwards, he returned to Kensington Gardens with watercolours and paper.² From then on, Roberts drew and painted, and, in 1923, at the age of nineteen, he registered at the École des beaux-arts in Montreal. He studied there until 1925, and later continued his education at The Art Students League in New York (1927–29), where he was taught by John Sloan (1871–1951), Boardman Robinson (1876–1952) and Max Weber (1881–1961). Roberts describes his years at the League as follows: "In Sloan's class I spent two years drawing from the nude. Most of the poses were no longer than five minutes. This was of value to me in teaching me to assess a subject rapidly and express its essentials in simple terms ... Under Boardman Robinson I studied the drawing of the figure during longer poses ... Through the teaching of Max Weber I gained some insight into the aims of the French moderns and under him made my first experiments in painting still life and the human figure."³

Roberts was the first artist-in-residence at Queen's University, Kingston (1933–36), where he gave art classes and lectures on art appreciation and organized a number of exhibitions. He moved back to Montreal in 1936 and, after trying to support himself from the sale of his work alone, he founded the Roberts-Neumann School of Art with Ernst Neumann (1907–1956). He later taught at the Art Association of Montreal School of Art and Design (1939–43; 1945–49), spending the summer months painting in rural Quebec, predominantly in the Eastern Townships, the Laurentians and the Outaouais, as well as in Georgian Bay, Ontario.

In the spring of 1943, Maurice Gagnon (1904–1956) organized a retrospective exhibition of Roberts's work for the Dominion Gallery in Montreal, which was a critical and financial success. Roberts continued to exhibit with the gallery regularly and, in 1948, he entered into an arrangement with them by which he received monthly payments in exchange for a specified number of artworks. This arrangement lasted until January 1957, when Roberts ended his dealings with the gallery.⁴

Roberts became a charter member of the Eastern Group in 1938 and of the Contemporary Arts Society in 1939. Also in 1939, he was elected a member of the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour and of the Canadian Society of Graphic Art. In 1952, Roberts's

¹ Michael Bell, *William Goodridge Roberts 1904–1974: Drawings*, exhib. cat. (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1976), p. 12.

² Goodridge Roberts, "From this Point I Looked Out," *Queen's Quarterly*, Autumn 1953, reprinted in Michael Bell, 1976, pp. 17–18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ James Borcoman, *Goodridge Roberts: A Retrospective / Une exposition retrospective*, exhib. cat. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), pp. 47–50.

work was chosen, together with that of David B. Milne (1882–1953), Emily Carr (1871–1945) and Alfred Pellan (1906–1988), for Canada's first exhibition at the Venice Biennale. The following year, he was awarded a Canadian government overseas fellowship to work and travel in France, and, in 1954, under the patronage of the Canadian Embassy, the Galerie R. Creuse showed his art in Paris. The University of New Brunswick appointed Roberts as its first resident-artist in 1959, and awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Laws in 1960. A major retrospective of his work was organized by the National Gallery of Canada in 1969–70 and by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in 1998–99.

Michael Bell points out that Roberts began to use his home environment and classroom as source material for his drawing in the early 1930s, when he could not afford a model.⁵ It was a practice he continued throughout his life. The drawings in this exhibition provide a glimpse of the variety of the less formal drawings Roberts produced in the 1930s and 1940s. They encompass a wide range of subjects, from drawings of family, friends and pets (cat. 10–12) to small drawings of local street scenes (cat. 8) and amusing cartoons about art and artists (cat. 18–20). Many are beautiful in their simplicity and use of line. A number of cartoons are of whimsical scenes, showing a sense of fun and silliness. Sandra Paikowsky, curator of the 1998 exhibition *Goodridge Roberts 1904–1974*, reveals that these drawings were often done to amuse Roberts's young cousins Ian, Flora, Archie, Theodore and Donald, the children of Roberts's cousin, the journalist Cuthbert Macdonald (cat. 2–8).⁶ Roberts painted the children often in the 1940s, and they were the sitters for some of his best-known figure paintings, including *Nude Boy* (1942, National Gallery of Canada), *Seated Boy* (1942, National Gallery of Canada), *Boy with a Dog* (1946, McGill University) and *Boy in Red Shirt* (1947, National Gallery of Canada).

Roberts created informal portraits of his friends and acquaintances, which were often made during evenings when he got together with them. During these gatherings Roberts would read poetry or tell humorous stories or, more frequently, listen to those around him while sketching them. Included here are drawings of his colleagues, Philip Surrey (1910–1990) (cat. 13) and Allan Harrison (1911–1988) (cat. 14). Surrey, a fellow member of the Eastern Group and the Contemporary Arts Society, met Roberts in 1937 or 1938 and exhibited with him frequently over the years.⁷ Allan Harrison, also a member of the Contemporary Arts Society, was a close friend between 1936 and 1946 and exhibited with him at the Contempo Art Studios in Ottawa in 1941.⁸ There are several sketches of Harrison in this collection. In another drawing, Roberts has captured the lankiness and ever-present cigarette in the hand

⁵ Michael Bell, 1976, p. 13.

⁶ Sandra Paikowsky, *Goodridge Roberts 1904–1974*, exhib. cat. (Kleinburg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1998), p. 109.

⁷ Interview with Philip Surrey by Al Pinsky, 12 December 1967. National Gallery of Canada fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

⁸ Interview with Allan Harrison by James Borcoman, 13 November 1967. National Gallery of Canada fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

of Douglas Duncan (1902–1968), manager of Toronto’s Picture Loan Society (cat. 15). Duncan had exhibited Roberts’s watercolours at the Picture Loan Society in February 1938, and it is likely that Roberts made the portrait then.

Roberts created humorous drawings for adults as well as for children, many of which include captions or amusing rhymes that he composed. The three wartime cartoons included in this exhibition (cat. 16–17) were likely drawn after he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and was appointed an official War Artist in September 1943. Roberts had applied earlier to the Air Force to paint camouflage, but had been rejected for medical reasons. As Sandra Paikowsky relates, he had his doubts about the value of the war art programme, believing that an artist’s efforts should be shown to the public during wartime in order “to make an immediate and potent contribution ... If they were not to be used as such, but only as war records to be seen after the war by a limited number of people, I should not be so sure of their value.”⁹ While stationed in England, Roberts was able to find witty subjects for his drawings and to capture some of the legendary fortitude exhibited by the British during the Second World War.

Roberts came from a literary family. His father, Theodore Roberts (1877–1953); his uncles, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts (1860–1943) and William Carman Roberts (1874–1941); his aunt, Jane Elizabeth Roberts MacDonald (1865–1921); and his cousin, Bliss Carman (1861–1929), were all noted Canadian writers at the turn of the twentieth century. Since the age of sixteen, Roberts had been writing poetry as another means of expressing himself.¹⁰ Included in this exhibition are two light-hearted examples of limericks Roberts composed to accompany his drawings (cat. 21–22).

The drawings in this collection provide us with another perspective on Roberts, who is well known for his landscape, still life and figure paintings. These quick renderings capture his impressions of his immediate surroundings and reveal his playful sense of humour. Roberts stopped making works like these after the Second World War, and, although he continued to sketch, his drawings became more detailed and refined, with more depth and gravitas.

Cyndie Campbell

Head, Archives, Documentation and Visual Resources

With special thanks to David Beddoe, Charles Hill and Frances Smith

⁹ Goodridge Roberts to H.O. McCurry, 5 May 1943, 5.42R Roberts, Goodridge (Canadian War Artists), National Gallery of Canada fonds, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

¹⁰ Goodridge Roberts, 1953, p. 23.



Checklist

All works, unless stated otherwise, are c. 1930–45, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Gift of Joan Roberts, 1999.

Visible *William Goodridge Roberts*

The Goodridge Roberts Drawing Inventory (GRDI) numbers were assigned to the drawings in the collection of Joan Roberts, the artist's wife, as part of a research project for Michael Bell's 1976 exhibition *William Goodridge Roberts 1904–1974: Drawings*, organized for the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario.



1

Self-portrait, c. 1958
Graphite on wove paper; 30.3 x 22.4 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Purchased 1992
36683

2

"The Pest."
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2328

3

Posture
Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm
Inscription: "One correct posture and
three incorrect postures"
GRDI 2329

4

Jugglers
Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 14 cm
GRDI 2354

5

"Moustache Trim"
Graphite on paper; 12.7 x 20.3 cm
GRDI 2496

"Man of Destiny"
Graphite on paper; 12.7 x 20.3 cm
GRDI 2497

Morning Gargle
Graphite on paper; 12.7 x 20.3 cm
GRDI 2498

6

In Front of the Mirror
Graphite on paper; 12.7 x 20.3 cm
GRDI 2345

7

"A Perfect Fit Sir!"
Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm
GRDI 2289

8 (Clockwise)

"Must be Something I Ate."
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2502

Learning to Dance
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2581

A Couple
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2663 (verso)

Cartoon Doodles III
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2610

At the Café Performance
Crayon on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2765

Steeplechase (Christmas Card Design),
c. 1936
Graphite on paper; 10.2 x 12.7 cm
Inscription: "Merry Christmas! from
Marian & Goodridge"
GRDI 2750

Room Interior
Graphite on paper; 30.5 x 22.9 cm
GRDI 2460

"Tight-Rope Walker"
Graphite and watercolour on paper;
20.3 x 12.7 cm
GRDI 2572

Dog Catcher, 1942
Crayon on paper; 17.8 x 19.1 cm
GRDI 2743

Formal Greeting
Graphite on paper; 23.5 x 48.3 cm
GRDI 2541

With Ralph's Head
Graphite on paper; 10.2 x 12.7 cm
Inscription: "Pat & Barridge Cat. (with
Ralph's head)"
GRDI 2573

Street Hockey
Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm
GRDI 2479

Untitled [Three figures in a wind storm]
Black ink on paper; 20.3 x 17.8 cm
GRDI 2504

9

Man Strolling with Hands in Pockets

Graphite on paper; 30.5 x 22.9 cm

GRDI 2303

10

A Card Game

Pen on paper; 11.4 x 21 cm

GRDI 2322

11

"Pat & the Barridge Cat."

Graphite and watercolour on paper;

20.3 x 12.7 cm

GRDI 2574

12

Man with Feet Up, Holding Pat

Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm

GRDI 2728

13

"Stinky Stories"

Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

GRDI 2313

14

Untitled [Man in chair]

Black ink over graphite on paper;

21.6 x 27.9 cm

GRDI 2367

15

Tall Man with Glasses

Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

GRDI 2355

16

Request for Leave

Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

Inscription: "He'd like to have leave to attend a meeting sir. / – Says he's chairman of the anti-war league"

GRDI 2336

17

The Tourist

Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm

Inscription: "When you've moved the Elgin Marbles dear dont [sic] forget to take my bags"

GRDI 2647

One Thing at a Time

Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm

Inscription: "One thing at a time Percy! First the hot water-bottel [sic] then the week-end book"

GRDI 2648

18

The Hairdo

Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

Inscription: "Its [sic] not fair professor! You never get beyond my hair-do."

GRDI 2330

19

The Duchess of Alba

Graphite on paper; 21.6 x 27.9 cm

Inscription: "She just can't forget that shes [sic] the Duchess of Alba"

GRDI 2584

Mother, by Renoir

Graphite on paper; 20.3 x 25.4 cm

Inscription: "And of course this one of dear mama is a Renoir"

GRDI 2575

20

The Flies

Graphite on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

Inscription: "I just can't get the flies professor"

GRDI 2310

21

The Old Lady of Dover

Black ink on paper; 19.1 x 24.8 cm

Inscription: "There was an old lady from Dover / Who kept a sharp eye on her chauffeur / "If I quite turn my back / He may give me a smack." / Said this dirty old lady from Dover."

GRDI 2278

22

The Cod

Black ink on paper; 27.9 x 21.6 cm

Inscription: "There's one thing we're inclined to applaud / In the intimate life of the cod; – / Though they do as they please / In a number of seas / They're no better at home than abroad."

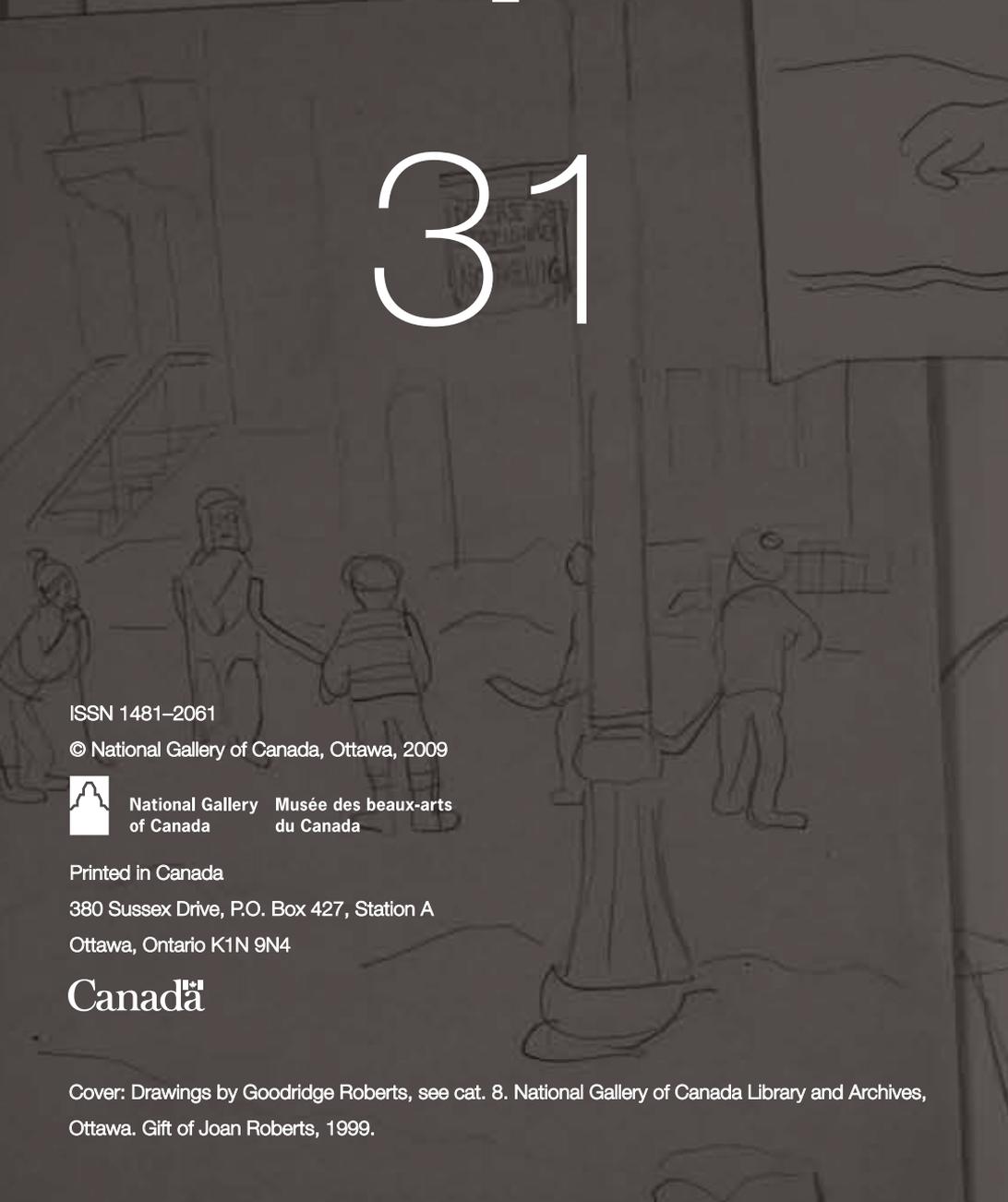
GRDI 2312



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