

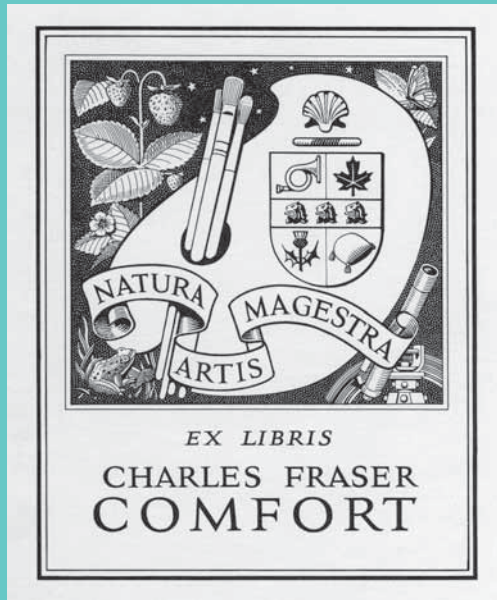


National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

16 September – 24 December 2009

THE LIBRARY OF CHARLES COMFORT





Charles Comfort Library Bookplate.
Photo © National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

Charles Fraser Comfort (1900–1994) was a distinguished Canadian artist, who served as Director of the National Gallery of Canada from 1960 to 1965 [1]. His personal library of more than 800 items reflects a multitude of interests and associations, forged during a lifetime devoted to the arts in Canada.

Comfort was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and began a lifetime of book collecting while attending primary school in England. Already showing promise as an artist at the age of eight, he was awarded a book as first prize for painting and brushwork at Little Hadham School, Hertfordshire [2].

In 1912 Comfort came to Canada, where he worked in the Winnipeg office of F.H. Brigden [3] and studied at the Winnipeg School of Art. He continued his education at the Art Students' League in New York, under Robert Henri [4]. Comfort returned to Canada in 1923 and married Louise Irene Chase the following year [5]. In 1925 they settled in Toronto, where Comfort established a commercial studio and taught at the Ontario College of Art (1935–38) and the University of Toronto (1938–60). His teaching appointment was interrupted by the Second World War, when he served in Europe as an official war artist [6].

Following the war, Comfort returned to his teaching position in Toronto and continued working as an artist. During this period, he studied seventeenth-century Dutch master techniques in the Netherlands, contributed articles to Canadian journals, and published his memoir, *Artist at War* (Ryerson Press, 1956) [7]. In 1960, he was appointed Director of the National Gallery of Canada [8]. At the conclusion of a five-year term, he resumed full-time painting. Works from this period include large public murals, portrait commissions, landscapes and experiments in abstraction.

During a long and distinguished career, Comfort enjoyed the friendship of Canadian artists, historians, diplomats, writers and critics [9–13]. He held membership in art societies: Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour (charter member,

1926), Canadian Society of Graphic Art, Ontario Society of Artists, Canadian Group of Painters (founding member, 1933), and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (president, 1957–60). Among many honours, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1972. The occasion of his honorary induction into the Arts and Letters Club (1978) was commemorated with an inscribed gift volume from his long-time friend and fellow painter, Carl Schaefer (1903–1995) [14].

The Comfort library consists mainly of modern imprints, with notable exceptions. An 1865 edition of Hermann Grimm's biography of Michelangelo (1475–1564) was presented to Comfort by A.Y. Jackson [15]. An eighteenth-century English translation of the treatise by French artist Charles Du Fresnoy (1611–1688), known for his interpretation of academic classicism, has been expertly restored in a modern binding by Anthony Gardner (1887–1973) [16]. A prized rare book, *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe* (1921), contains illustrations of costumes and set designs by Natalia Gontcharova and leading artists who contributed to the Diaghilev ballet. Comfort's copy, in original binding, is signed "Chas. F. Comfort / 1925" [17].

The content of the Comfort library reflects the artist's lifelong interests. Methods and materials in painting [18–19], history and theory of art [20–21], and the work of individual artists [22–23] are strongly represented, complemented by Canadian illustrated books [24–27], as well as works of fiction, travel and history. The Second World War is a prominent subject, including histories, memoirs, and illustrated volumes on war art [28–29].

The library is rich in association copies, with personal inscriptions to both Charles and Louise Comfort, occasionally accompanied by newspaper clippings, photographs, greeting cards and personal letters [30–31]. The books and accompanying materials in Charles Comfort's library document his formation as an artist, his steadfast commitment to artistic practice and teaching, and his significant contribution to the mosaic of Canadian arts and letters [32].

Jo Nordley Beglo, Bibliographer

CHECKLIST

The materials and photographic works in this exhibition are drawn from the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

1. Copy photograph: *Charles Comfort with Palette and Brush*, 1932.
2. Brenda. *Froggy's Little Brother*. New ed. London: John F. Shaw, 1908 [?]. Bookplate: Hertfordshire City Council / Little Hadham School / Prize / for drawings & brushwork / awarded to / Fraser Comfort / James McBurny / Chairman of Managers / 23 Dec. 1908.
3. J.E. Middleton. *Canadian Landscape, as Pictured by F.H. Brigden*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1944. Annotated by Charles Comfort. Inscription: To Major Charles Comfort / Mrs. Louise Comfort / Ruth / Ann / from their old friend / Nov. 44 / Fred H. Brigden.
4. Robert Henri. *The Art Spirit*. Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1923. Annotated by Charles Comfort.
5. Newton MacTavish. *The Fine Arts in Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1925. Inscription: To Charles – / with love – / From Louise – / Xmas 1925.
6. *The Canadians in Britain, 1939–1944*. 2nd ed. Ottawa: Published by authority of the Minister of National Defence, 1946. (The Canadian Army at War; no. 1). Frontispiece by Charles Comfort.
7. Charles Fraser Comfort. *Artist at War*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956. Copy photograph: *Charles Comfort Sketching a Building in Ruins* [n.d.].
8. Jean Sutherland Boggs. *The National Gallery of Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971. Inscription: To Charles Comfort – / the most / understanding / of predecessors* / Jean Boggs / *and teachers. Photograph: *Charles Comfort, Director, National Gallery of Canada, Looking at Abstraction by Lawren S. Harris*, 1960.

9. William Arthur Deacon. *Poteen: A Pot-pourri of Canadian Essays*. Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1926. Inscription: To my good friend / Charles F. Comfort / whose brilliant portrait / did so much to make / this book go / William Arthur Deacon / Toronto / Sep. 21st / 1926.
10. Roloff Bery. *An Aegean Note-book: Comments on a Mid-century Odyssey in Greece*. New York: Knoedler, 1950. With 20 original lithographs. Inscription: To Charles / and Louise / Xmas 1950 / Wilfred. No. 178 of 300, signed and numbered by the artist.
11. Lucien Brault. *Ottawa: Old & New*. Ottawa: Ottawa Historical Information Institute, 1946. Accompanied by index cards with handwritten annotations by Charles Comfort. Inscription: A ce grand artiste canadien / Charles Comfort / cet hommage respectueux / Lucien Brault / Aylmer, 16 mars 1977.
12. Carl F. Klinck. *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965. Inscription: For the rare privilege / of knowing Charles F. Comfort poet-painter / I inscribe this book / Cordially / Carl F. Klinck / Hull, Quebec / 16 October 1970.
13. Blodwen Davies. *A Study of Tom Thomson: The Story of a Man Who Looked for Beauty and for Truth in the Wilderness*. 1st ed. Toronto: Blodwen Davies, 1935. Printed privately; set by hand by the author and printed on a Kelsey Press in an edition of 450 copies, of which this is number 248. Signed by the author. Letter from the author to Charles Comfort, tipped in.
14. Margaret Gray, Margaret Rand, Lois Steen. *Carl Schaefer*. Agincourt, Ont.: Gage Publishing, 1977. (Canadian artists; 3). Photograph of Carl Schaefer inscribing this book tipped onto title page. Inscription: Especially autographed for / Charles Comfort my old and / good friend and to mark this / day of his being created an / Honorary Member of the Arts and Letters Club / Carl Schaefer / Toronto 31st March 1978. Copy photograph: *On the Roof of a House, Grosvenor Square, London, 1943* [?] Left to right: Edwin Holgate, Paul Goranson, Charles Comfort, Carl Schaefer, Eric Aldwinkle.
15. Hermann Grimm. *Life of Michael Angelo*. Vol. 2. London: Smith, Elder, 1865. Inscription: This book was presented to me / by A.Y. Jackson / March 1955. Just before he / left Toronto for Manotick. / Chas. F. Comfort. Inscription: Norah Thomson / t / A.Y. Jackson.
16. Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy. *The Art of Painting*. London: Printed for B. Lintott, 1716. Numbered binding (no. 800) by Anthony Gardner, 1967; binder's apologia inserted.
17. Walter Archibald Propert. *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe, 1909–1920*. London: John Lane, 1921. Limited edition no. 355/500. Signed: Chas. F. Comfort / 1925.
18. International Museum Office. *Manual on the Conservation of Paintings*. Paris: [s.n.], 1940. Inscription: To Charles Comfort / from / Elizabeth Wynn Wood. / Feb. 1947.
19. A.P. Laurie. *The Materials of the Painter's Craft in Europe and Egypt from Earliest Times to the End of the XVIIIth Century: With Some Account of Their Preparation and Use*. London: T.N. Foulis, 1910. Annotated by Charles Comfort.
20. Albert C. Barnes. *The Art in Painting*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. Signed: B. Brooker / '26. Inscription: A gift from Bertram Brooker / in the spring of 1930 / Chas. F. Comfort.
21. F.B. Housser. *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1926. Annotated by Charles Comfort.
22. Ambroise Vollard. *Paul Cézanne: His Life and Art*. New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1923. Annotated by Charles Comfort.
23. Roger Eliot Fry. *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. London: Hogarth Press, 1927. Inscription: To Chas & Louise / With best wishes / from / Will / Dec. 1928.
24. W.J. Healy. *Women of Red River: Being a Book Written from the Recollections of Women Surviving from the Red River Era*. Winnipeg: Russell, Lang, 1923. Illustrated by Charles Comfort; frontispiece by W.J. Phillips. Signed: Chas. F. Comfort / Winnipeg 1923.
25. Lawren Harris. *Contrasts: A Book of Verse*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922.
26. Georges Bouchard. *Other Days, Other Ways: Silhouettes of the Past in French Canada*. Montreal: L. Carrier, 1928. Woodcuts by Edwin H. Holgate.
27. W.E. Greening. *The Ottawa*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961. Woodcuts by Laurence Hyde.
28. George F.G. Stanley. *Canada's Soldiers, 1604–1954: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1954. Illustrations by C.W. Jefferys. Inscription: To / Charles F. Comfort / with happy recollections / of our service during / World War II in the / Historical Section / from the author / George Stanley / Christmas / 1954.
29. *War Pictures by British Artists*. London: Oxford University Press, 1942. Vol. 4, "Army." Inscription: Chas / from / Will / July / 42. / London.
30. Richard Ettinghausen. *Paintings of the Sultans and Emperors of India in American Collections*. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1961. Inscription: For Charles and Louise Comfort / with love from Canada House, New Delhi / Norah E. Michener.
31. Harry Adaskin. *A Fiddler's World: Memoirs to 1938*. Vancouver: November House, 1977. Inscription: For dear Charles and Louise, / friends of our youth, and friends / of our old age. / Much love for Christmas / 1977. / Sincerely / Fran and Harry / Vancouver.
32. Charles Comfort. *Algonquin Lake*, 1947. Sampson-Matthews Silkscreen Reproductions Collection.

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