



THE LIBRARY OF  
**FRITZ**  
**BRANDTNER**

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA  
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14 JANUARY TO 25 APRIL 2014



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[THAN] ANY  
PSYCHIA-  
TRISTS CAN  
PRESCRIBE."  
- FRITZ BRANDTNER

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**RITZ BRANDTNER** (1896–1969) was born in Danzig,

Germany (now Gdansk, Poland) and lived there until he emigrated to Canada in 1928. By that date he was already an accomplished artist familiar with the currents of European modernism. A collection of 172 books and other materials from his personal library was donated to the National Gallery of Canada by his friend Paul Kastel, of the Kastel Gallery, in 2006, and this exhibition presents a selection of the contents.

The jewel in the crown of the collection is Brandtner's Notebook, which dates from the 1950s [1]. Crammed with writing, it contains statements of a personal credo, observations about his professional life, historical analysis, comments on the Canadian art scene, drawings, and quotations ranging from Freud to Abraham Lincoln and from Confucius to Louis Armstrong.

Of the published books in the Brandtner library, a number were acquired in Germany before his arrival in Canada. Typical gifts from Mieke Preuss, his fiancée, were inexpensive volumes from a series titled *Junge Kunst* ("new art"), which often featured contemporaries who would later appear on the Nazis' list of "degenerate" artists [2, 3, 4]. One, Max Pechstein (1881–1955), contributed an original woodcut to the *Almanach auf das Jahr 1920* ("almanac for the year 1920"), a notable publication on German expressionist artists of the day [5]. There is also a book of reproductions of drawings by George Grosz (1893–1959), titled *Der Spiesser-Spiegel* ("the mirror of the bourgeoisie") [6], a bitterly satirical volume portraying the decadence and callousness of Berlin society in the 1920s. Fritz had served in the German army during World War I, and it is interesting to find amongst his books one written by a British artist who served on the opposite side: *Modern War: Paintings* by C.R.W. Nevinson (1889–1946) [7]. Of the same generation, both artists had been strongly influenced by contemporary European avant-garde movements in art.

Some of the titles in his collection provide insight into Fritz's personal life. On 7 April 1928, at the German port of Bremen, he boarded the steamer *Seydlitz* bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Bremen housed a museum of the artist Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907), where Fritz purchased a postcard to send to Mieke. Because he missed the last collection of mail from the ship, the postcard was not mailed until the ship docked ten days later on the opposite side of the Atlantic. Mieke wrote the date on which she received the card, 28 April, and later pasted it into a book about Modersohn-Becker [8], which she mailed to him as a 32nd birthday present. The following year she joined him in Winnipeg, where they married.

One of the first books Fritz purchased after arriving in his new home illustrates why he chose Canada: namely, a fervent interest in indigenous art and culture. The *Downfall of Temlaham*, by Marius Barbeau, with illustrations by A.Y. Jackson, Emily Carr and others, is inscribed "F. Brandtner 1928, Winnipeg, bought after the fire on Main street for 10 cent." The volume has indeed suffered water damage, and at some point Fritz made for it a jacket of coarse cloth, decorated with a motif inspired by Haida house-post designs [9]. Inspired by the same interest, he travelled to the west coast in 1930, while employed as a designer at the Winnipeg branch of the

graphic arts firm Brigdens. A portfolio contains mounted photographs of Banff, Vancouver, Prince Rupert and other locations, as well as group portraits of Brigdens employees, including Fritz himself [10]. A Canadian National Railways pamphlet entitled *Totems of Kitwanga and North Central British Columbia* has survived as an insert in his copy of Marius Barbeau's *Totem Poles of the Gitksan, Upper Skeena River, British Columbia* [11].

Fritz's fascination with indigenous artistic cultures outside North America is reflected in the protective covers he made for two other books [12, 13]. His later career in art education, which developed after the Brandtners moved from Winnipeg to Montreal in 1934, is also strongly in evidence. *Native Arts of the Pacific Northwest* [14] appears to have been a gift from pupils at one of the summer schools he directed; they signed their names to a Christmas card pasted in the front. Inserted in the volume are book and magazine clippings, and photographs covering a period of nearly forty years, from his 1930 trip west, to the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. Another volume, *Education through Art*, by Herbert Read [15], is inscribed: "Fredericton NB August 10 1949 To Mr. Brandtner with our sincere appreciation," and signed with twelve names. Befitting his role as a teacher, the library reflects broad subjects including architecture [16] and cultural history. Fritz was a fairly compulsive underliner and annotater in pencil and ink: his copy of Clive Bell's *Civilization* [17] include such written interjections as "ha ha" and "how can you assume that?"

Montreal afforded the Brandtners a wider circle of friends and a more progressive artistic milieu. They had arrived with a letter of introduction from the Winnipeg artist L.L. (Lionel Lemoine) FitzGerald (1890–1956) to the critic and writer Robert Ayre (1900–1980), who later inscribed to them a copy of his short story "Mr. Sycamore" [18]. *Art as Experience*, an influential work by the philosopher John Dewey, carries the bookplate of Norman Bethune (1890–1939), the Canadian physician soon to depart for the Spanish Civil War and later for China, designed by Fritz with the motto: "This book belongs to Norman Bethune and his Friends" [19]. The library reflects Fritz's continuing engagement with modern art in many forms [20, 21, 22, 23]. The ephemeral material he inserted into the book is sometimes as interesting as the book itself. For example, Fritz's copy of *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, by Ralph Mayer, has tucked inside the front covers a couple of small pamphlets titled *Colour Mixtures* and *Artists Materials*, which throw light on Fritz's choice of paints [24].

For all the wide reading and interest in theory demonstrated by his library, Fritz Brandtner had a refreshingly down-to-earth approach to art: as he wrote in his Notebook: "five minutes of honest relaxation playing with brush and paper or a piece of wire or a piece of string can be a better therapy [than] any psychiatrists can prescribe."

JONATHAN FRANKLIN

*Chief, Library, Archives and Research Fellowships Program*

# CHECKLIST

- 1 Fritz Brandtner. Notebook. Unpublished, 1950s.
- 2 Georg Biermann. *Max Pechstein*. Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1920.
- 3 Ludwig Meidner. *Eine autobiographische Plauderei*. Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1923.
- 4 Erich Wiese. *Paul Gauguin*. Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1923.
- 5 *Almanach auf das Jahr 1920*. Berlin: Fritz Gurlitt, 1920.
- 6 George Grosz. *Der Spiesser-Spiegel*. Dresden: C. Reissner, 1925.
- 7 C.R.W. Nevinson. *Modern War: Paintings*. London: G. Richards, 1917.
- 8 Gustav Pauli. *Paula Modersohn-Becker*. Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1919.  
Postcard from Fritz Brandtner to Mieke Preuss (later Brandtner)  
postmarked 17 April 1928.
- 9 Marius Barbeau. *The Downfall of Témaham*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1928.
- 10 Unidentified photographer. Black and white photographs mounted  
on card. 1930s.
- 11 Marius Barbeau. *Totem Poles of the Gitksan, Upper Skeena River,  
British Columbia*. Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1929. *Totems of Kitwanga and  
North Central British Columbia*. Montreal: Canadian National  
Railways, undated.
- 12 Frederic Huntington Douglas. *Indian Art of the United States*.  
New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1941.
- 13 Leon Underwood. *Figures in Wood of West Africa*. London: J. Tiranti,  
1947.
- 14 Portland Art Museum (Oregon). *Native Arts of the Pacific Northwest*.  
Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1949.
- 15 Herbert Read. *Education through Art*. New York: Pantheon, 1945.
- 16 Joseph Watterson. *Architecture: Five Thousand Years of Building*.  
New York: Norton, 1950.
- 17 Clive Bell. *Civilization: An Essay*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938.
- 18 Robert Ayre. *Mr. Sycamore*. New York: Story Magazine, vol. 10,  
no. 57, April 1937.
- 19 John Dewey. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch, 1934.  
Bookplate of Norman Bethune.
- 20 Rosamund Frost. *Contemporary Art*. New York: Crown, 1942.
- 21 Herbert Read. *Contemporary British Art*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951.
- 22 Herbert Read (ed.). *Unit 1, the Modern Movement in English  
Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*. London, Toronto: Cassell, 1934.
- 23 James Johnson Sweeney. *Henry Moore*. New York: Museum of  
Modern Art, 1946.
- 24 Ralph Mayer. *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*.  
New York: Viking, 1940. *Colour Mixtures: A Few Hints by a Professional  
Painter*. London: Winsor & Newton, undated. *Artists Materials*.  
London: Winsor & Newton, 1962.



LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

EXHIBITION

NO.

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ISSN 1481-2061  
© NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, OTTAWA, 2014

PRINTED IN CANADA  
380 SUSSEX DRIVE, P.O. BOX 427, STATION A  
OTTAWA, ONTARIO K1N 9N4



National Gallery  
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Canada

Cover: Fritz Brandtner. Jacket (detail) for *Figures in Wood of West Africa*, by Leon Underwood, 1947 [13].  
Back cover: Fritz Brandtner. Jacket (detail) for *Contemporary British Art*, by Herbert Read, 1951 [21].  
Short panel: Fritz Brandtner. Detail of Notebook. Unpublished, 1950s [1].

f. brandtner