Artists, Society, and Activism: The Federation of Canadian Artists and the Social Organization of Canadian Art

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Abstract The Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA), established in the wake of the 1941 Kingston Conference, became a central institution through which Canadian artists attempted to re-organize their relationship to society. In particular, members of the FCA built on a series of more long-standing concerns about the problematic relationship between art and society under conditions of modernity. The FCA’s goal was to bridge the gap between the arts and life and, as such, it served as a focal point through which the artists debated the character this new relationship should take. Looking first to contribute to Canada’s war effort and then post-war reconstruction, the FCA ultimately instituted a series of policies that lead it away from its original objectives even while it maintained a discourse critical of the fractured and alienating nature of modern life and culture.

In late June 1941, over 140 artists, educators, critics, gallery officials and civil servants converged on Kingston, Ontario, for the first national Canadian artists conference. Expectations among conference organizers ran high. “I have no doubt in my mind,” Queen’s Artist-in-Residence André Bieler wrote National Gallery director H.O. McCurry, “that this Conference, if successful, will be the sign post of importance on the long road of Canadian art.” In Bieler’s view, the conference needed to address two pressing issues: recent technical developments in artistic production and the role and place of the artist is society. As the Kingston Conference unfolded, the second of these issues took precedence as artists voiced their disaffection with the current state of Canadian culture and, in particular, what they viewed as the problematic relationship between the artist and society. This disaffection led the assembled artists to follow Bieler’s lead and establish the Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA), Canada’s first national artists organization that brought artists together as artists.

The 1941 Kingston Conference occupies a prominent position in Canadian cultural historiography. A variety of different studies argue that the Kingston Conference constituted a key stepping stone to the realization of a professionalized, state-supported Canadian cultural infrastructure. As early 1951, for example, key conference organizer André Bieler, suggested that the Kingston Conference began the process leading to the Royal Commission on National Development in Arts, Letters, and Sciences. In Making Culture, Maria Tippett supported this assessment, arguing that the Kingston Conference stood at a key dividing line in the institutional history of Canadian art. It served to draw out the idea that the arts merited state financial support and should not be left on a laissez-faire basis. More recently, Jeffrey Brison has argued
that the Kingston Conference should be seen as part of an elite driven process of cultural nation-building that culminated in the post-World War II expansion of state support for scholarship, medicine, education, and the arts.\(^5\)

The approach taken in this essay is different. The extensive archival records left by the FCA and its key officials allow us to explore the historical dynamics of artistic activism in Canada under conditions of modernity. What factors conditioned artistic activism in modern Canada? What role should the arts play in society? And, how did this group of artists address the problems they confronted? The modern age, Canadian artists and intellectuals recognized, carried with it a series of interrelated cultural processes that proved intensely problematic for the arts. These included: the rise of consumerism linked to mass media, the intensive and extensive commodification of the arts, the economic instability of art markets, and an increased social detachment of the arts. Combined, these diverse processes produced rising artistic social alienation. In both Europe and post-World War II Canada, social and cultural alienation propelled the growth of the avant-garde. As both Peter Burger and Renato Poggioli note in their classic studies of the European avant-garde, the modern age problematized the social, economic, cultural, and political status of the artist. The avant-garde constituted a reaction against socioeconomic, cultural, and political alienation. Its objective was to fashion a cultural praxis that animated a new fusion of art and society.\(^6\)

Beginning in the 1930s, shifting aesthetic styles, the generalized economic crisis of the Depression, and new political issues forced Canadian artists to directly confront the social detachment of the arts. In this sense, the Kingston Conference, and then the FCA, represented the culmination of artistic, intellectual, and organization initiatives that began much earlier. The FCA served as the vehicle through which artists articulated their concerns with the state of Canadian culture and devised responses to what they viewed as their marginalized social position. Initially, Canadian artists saw World War II as a key opportunity to contribute to society and illustrate the importance of the arts. Increasingly, however, their attention was devoted to post-War cultural planning and the construction of a new artistic order. Exactly what this order would entail was the issue that stood at the core of FCA activism.

**Modernity and the Problem of Art**

In her study of the Kingston Conference, Hélène Sicotte argues that the Depression and the beginning of the Second World War forced artists to reconsider the role they played in society.\(^7\) In important ways, however, the issues raised at the Kingston Conference reflected a specific conception of modern culture that transcended the press of immediate circumstances. At the Kingston Conference and within the FCA, Canadian artists mobilized discourses that dated from the early 1930s. Canadian artists and allied intellectuals began to articulate a discourse that challenged the economic and cultural processes of modernity that refashioned long-standing concerns about the economic stability of the arts. They aimed to articulate a position that addressed two inter-related but different issues: the economic status of the artist and the cultural problems of modernity. Leo Smith, for example, argued that the problems confronted by musicians in modern Canada were not directly related to the Depression. “Music,” he wrote, “has at the moment some new problems quite other than those associated with the state of trade […] .”\(^8\) Musicians, Smith argued, confronted an ironic situation: there was, he believed, a greater demand for music then ever before, yet less demand for the services of musicians. Musicians faced new forms of
cultural competition from cinema and radio along with a listening public that could not differentiate good music from bad. “The trend of social legislation,” he wrote, “the growth of democracy, the development of mechanical instruments, scientific inventions, etc., have combined [...] to increase uncritical listening.” The result, he argued, was dramatic expansion of “cheap music” at the expense of the musical arts.9

In his various writings on the arts, Group of Seven member and future FCA activist Arthur Lismer argued that a series of broader historical processes had dislodged the arts from a place of importance in culture. Historically, Lismer suggested, art had played an important and creative social role. In the modern age its cultural prominence had been dislodged by science, mass media, and religion. The modern productive process, he argued, created goods that had little artistic merit, but won popular acceptance because industry used "high-pressure salesmanship" to delude consumers. Artists, Lismer claimed, were being forced out of their traditional occupations and into commercial pursuits that allowed no freedom for creativity. He characterized commercial art as the handmaid of industry: it debased and dehumanized the nature of art.10 “We are concerned about Art,” Lismer wrote as early as 1929, "because Art is separating itself from life, and we are forced to contemplate Art as a separate and distinct department of human affairs.”11

In his writings, the noted folklorist Marius Barbeau implicitly supported Lismer’s arguments by drawing a stark distinction between modern culture and the past. The modern age, Barbeau believed, ushered in a new relationship between the artist and society. Barbeau never explained precisely what he believed triggered the development of this new relationship but its consequences, he said, were evident: the evolution of art had stalled.12 The issue of artistic vitality, Barbeau explained in the midst of the Depression, did not relate to wealth but to the way in which societies approached art. Using the “ancient” artistic traditions of colonial new France as an example, Barbeau argued that even relatively poor societies could create the circumstances for the evolution of great art if they were committed to it and understood its value:

They [the colonial population of New France] mortgaged the future to pay the craftsmen on the installment plan and often in kind, but always met their obligations. Art was essential, as in mediaeval times, not a mere luxury, as it has become in modern life. Hence its vitality, at a time when most of America was still a wilderness.13

“The collaboration among common people, the craftsmen, and the diocesan authorities,” he concluded, “is what made the growth of architecture in Quebec possible.”14

For A.M. Stephens, the issue was systemic. The current economic system, Stephens noted in an essay on the subject, was widely held to impede the flourishing of the arts. And, while he believed that artists needed to find inspiration within themselves,15 he acknowledged the difficulties of the contemporary context. Part of the problem the arts confronted, Stephens argued, was that their social utility was not evident. The value of art, he believed, was spiritual, relating to the “inner man.” A larger part of the arts’ problems related to social changes. In Europe, these changes did not have as great an impact because of the legacy of an aristocratic tradition: “[t]he scholar, the artist, the man of leisure and culture still receives a meed of respect in a society which does not measure men by monetary and utilitarian standards.”16 He faulted a series of other factors – from industrialization to scientific education – for the low state in which he believed art was
mired. The result was a decline in the quality of art and a threat to the spiritual aspects of humanity: “[u]ndoubtedly there will be a crying need for the message of art to leaven the materialism of an age in which economics will speak with the authority of the law […].” Other critics agreed. In 1939 Graham McInnes noted a “widespread opinion” that “the development of Canadian” was “languishing in the doldrums.”

Acadia University art professor and critic Walter Abell, and later FCA member, provided what was perhaps the most blunt discussion of the subject. Building on ideas he began to articulate in the 1930s, Abell wondered about the consumption priorities of modern culture. The problem, he said, on a collective level, lay in popular consumption patterns. “After all,” he wrote in one essay on the subject, “nations like the United States and Canada spend millions […] annually on movies, automobiles, -- even on such trivial satisfactions as chewing gum.” Was it unreasonable to believe that with the proper stimulus “people could be inspired to spend a million or two on contemporary art.”

In the 1930s, exactly how the problem of art was to be addressed was a matter of considerable debate. Following Barbeau, Hilda Ridley argued that Canadian artists needed to return to their traditional roots and base their work in Canadian popular traditions. By grounding artistic production in popular traditions Ridley and Barbeau believed that the arts could bridge the disjuncture between themselves and society. Stephens suggested that the problem was not easily resolved. Despite what he saw as a “crying need” for the arts, few solutions to their problems were immediately evident. Ultimately, he believed that artists might have to learn to accept their lot – poverty and isolation – and rely on their internal spiritual strength.

Audrey Alexandra Burr argued in The Dalhousie Review that Canadians needed to re-orient their values, while Leo Smith hoped that better education might allow Canadians to understand the differences between “cheap” and real music. For still others, the real problem with Canadian art lay in the attitude of artists themselves. For H.S.M. Carver, the real problem of the arts lay in artists unwillingness to engage social life: “a work of art which does not have reference to the materials, the manners, and the problems amongst which we live, is meaningless.” It followed that if artists wanted their work recognized as socially meaningful, they had to take the lead and produce such work.

For an increasing number of Canadian artists, the solution to their problems lay in some form of self-organization. In 1941, when André Bieler urged the Kingston Conference to create the FCA, the idea of an artists organization was not new. In different forms, artists’ organizations had existed in Canada since the mid-nineteenth century. By the late-nineteenth century permanent organizations such as the Royal Canadian Academy and the Ontario Society of Artists had been established. By the inter-war era, a variety of medium-based groups, local art clubs, amateur groups, and exhibition societies – the most famous of which was the Group of Seven -- had come into existence. These organizations functioned in a variety of capacities: they served to promote the interests of the arts, recognize excellence, organize exhibitions, and address the interests of amateurs and local communities. In the 1930s, the focus and objectives of arts organizations began to change as artists and other arts professionals created new bodies that were intended to meet what they viewed as the pressing needs of their time. In 1935, for example, Walter Abell helped found the Maritime Art Association (MAA). The MAA’s objective was to link established amateur and professional arts organizations in Maritime Canada together in order to coordinate arts activities on a regional level, maintain connections with the National Gallery, increase the diffusion of art through traveling exhibitions, and promote arts
education. In addition, the MAA established a magazine – Maritime Art – to broaden arts discourse. In these ways, the MAA linked artists with interested amateurs in an educational project designed to broaden knowledge of the arts on a regional level and maintain connections to a national artistic community.26 Almost as soon as it was created, the MAA and its programme attracted national attention.27

The Toronto Picture Loan Society (TPLS) had similar objectives. The TPLS was a non-profit organization that included both artists and non-artists. Its members paid a small annual fee that allowed them to rent original artwork on a per month basis. “It is hoped,” the art critic Graham McInnes wrote of the Society, “...to make it easier for the public to become acquainted with the work of contemporary artists and for artists to have their work more widely known.” Such a venture, McInnes noted, was designed “to promote a greater understanding between the artist and the public.”28

Toronto’s Allied Arts Council (AAC) and Montreal’s Seven Arts Club worked with similar goals. The AAC was intended to draw together artists who worked in different media in order to facilitate dialogue on common problems and to promote a more generalized policy for the support of the arts in Canada. One of the AAC’s foundational principles was that both the arts and society suffered because of artistic social detachment. “[M]uch good creative work is being produced in the Dominion; Canada has eleven million people; how can the artist and his public be brought together in such a way that the artists may support himself and the public secure the cultural amenities to which it is entitled?”29 According to Walter Abell, the Seven Arts Club employed the same discourse. “Its main concern,” he reported in Maritime Art, is the problem of the relation between the arts [and] society. It desires to promote an understanding of the arts by stressing the interdependence of the several arts and their roots in human experience. Its activities will include efforts to bridge the gap between the artist and the public, to develop more successful methods of marketing art, and to promote more effective art education.30

The formation of these societies marked a new stage in the institutional history of Canadian art. In the 1920s, the institutional history of Canadian art had been built around the Group of Seven’s nationalist project.31 The new artistic societies of the 1930s tended to ignore aesthetic distinctions and looked to promote a broader unity among artists. Where the Group of Seven looked to promote a particular conception of art and educate the public into the merits of a specific aesthetic, the new societies abandoned this distinction in the face of common problems. In one way or another, artists and intellectuals linked the problems of the arts to the cultural processes of modernity and viewed self-organization as a key strategy in a new form of activism. The specific tactics that flowed from this strategy included public education, dialogue, marketing, and publicity. The new societies looked not simply to unify artists but to make art more accessible through picture loans, educational exhibitions and public lectures. Such tactics, they clearly hoped, would establish new links between the arts and society. The FCA mobilized a similar discourse and used similar tactics. As a more widely-based organization, however, it also looked to provide more encompassing solutions to the cultural problems of modernity.

Organizing the Arts

The Kingston Conference’s functional objectives were evident in the speakers chosen to address the assembled artists. In design, the conference built from initial tributes to the importance and grandeur of the arts,32 to blunt assessments of the poor economic state of the arts in Canada to
philosophical discussion of the relationship between art and society, to practical policy ideas taken from the American state support programmes designed during the Depression.\textsuperscript{33} For commentators, such as Walter Abell, who had been recruited to speak at the Conference, the issue that lay before artists was significant. Cultural reform, he argued, was needed to realize the potential of a truly democratic order in which the arts played a vibrant social role.\textsuperscript{34} In this way, the Conference linked a series of ideas together into a single discourse: there was a nobility and grandeur to art which was currently suffering under contemporary economic conditions that were, themselves, symptomatic of broader problems. The solution lay in self-organization designed to stimulate pragmatic policy options. The best means to realize the potential of socially meaningful art was through a national artistic organization. On all these points, there was general agreement among the assembled artists. Consensus broke down in consideration of the type of organization artists should create.

Bieler made little secret of his views. In his opening comments to the Conference, he urged the assembled body to create an artists’ federation. This new federation, he argued, should not attempt to mould a common aesthetic among its members. The best course of action was a federation that worked through local bodies that came together at the federal level. As a federation, the united body would serve, largely, as a lobby group whose attention would be directed to securing state support for the arts. State support, he said, would lead to a Canadian artistic renaissance.\textsuperscript{35} As he envisioned it, the new federation would embrace existing local arts societies and would “provide facilities for the exchange of ideas [and] for national exhibitions.” Bieler’s model for the FCA, then, was that it would serve as a federated umbrella organization co-ordinating and supporting the work of local art societies while lobbying the state for a new cultural policy that provides support for the arts in Canada.\textsuperscript{36} The model of state support that interested Bieler most was the American New Deal arts programmes which both directly funded artistic work and reserved a percentage of construction costs associated with new public buildings for art.\textsuperscript{37}

In the course of the Conference, an alternative conception of an artists organization was articulated by a number of different people. One artist, for example, urged the body to consider a more union-oriented format. In so doing, she articulated a perspective in which artists would carry their self-organization into something akin to a professionalized form of self-regulation that had real power in civil society:

If we consider that the doctors and the lawyers and even the engineers had the sense long ago to organize themselves in order to obtain fair treatment and to earn a living, surely we should not have to consider ourselves on the same level as the agricultural worker who is unorganized, and is suffering the consequences. If we do not organize ourselves, nobody else can do it for us.\textsuperscript{38}

As Vancouver painter Jack Shadbolt, Chair of the Conference’s Resolutions Committee, explained, this format appeared more radical but looked to accomplish many of the same objectives Bieler had defined as the proper work of his proposed federation. The difference is that it would have a more interventionist mandate, particularly with regard to the art market. The new organization would work for the “general welfare of practicing artists” by helping to organize the art market, staging exhibitions, and through “general propaganda and educational work.” Its chief objective, however, would still be to “go to the government with [solutions] practical problems, or something similar to the P.W.A. or the W.P.A. in the United States.”\textsuperscript{39}

To resolve the issue, and create an
organizational structure for the new body, the assembled artists struck a continuing committee that included some of the leading Canadian artists and critics of the time: Maritime Art editor and Acadian University art professor Walter Abell, former members of the Group of Seven Lawren Harris (elected in absentia), A.Y. Jackson, and the sculptor Frances Loring. Conference organizer André Bieler was to serve as president. The continuing committee was also to address a number of other resolutions passed at the Conference, including those that called for an artistic war records programme (similar to that which had been developed during World War I) an expansion of university-based art programmes, national touring exhibitions, and improved arts education in the public schools.

The continuing committee framed a constitution that attempted to find a middle ground between these different positions. The body was to be called the Federation of Canadian Artists with a membership consisting of all artists “and related professional workers.” Non-artists could join if they were actively interested in the arts and supported the FCA’s aims. The new constitution stated that the FCA’s mandate was to unite “all Canadian artists, critics, and related professional workers for fellowship, mutual effort in promoting common aims, and for the expression of the artists’ point of view as a creative factor in national life.” The FCA would be specifically dedicated to improving “the economic status of the artist by promoting markets for his work and by raising his professional standing […]” It was to encourage arts education with the aim of fostering “an increased appreciation, enjoyment, and use of art on the part of the public.” This also included support for the National Gallery of Canada. Finally, the FCA would issue a national arts magazine, help co-ordinate the activities and support the efforts of other groups interested in the same matters, and help research “the problems affecting the development of Canadian culture.”

In terms of structure, the FCA was to be a national organization. To ensure its standing across the country, all regions of Canada were to have representation on its executive. The executive consisted of a president, vice-president, executive secretary, editor of publications, and the chairs of seven different working groups that were to formulate and guide FCA policy. There were two different orders of working groups. On the one hand, the organization’s constitution called for the FCA to create medium-based working groups in the areas of painting and graphic arts, sculpture, industrial arts and crafts, and architecture and community planning. The other groups addressed different aspects of the relationship between the arts and society: education, exhibitions, and public relations. In addition, the constitution set out a plan for the FCA to organize a series of regional committees that would serve to integrate local societies into the broader national federation, but there purpose was, at that point in time, not clearly specified. In May, 1942, Canadian artists reassembled on a smaller scale in Toronto, to approve this new constitution and structure, with Bieler elected as the organization’s first president.

The artists assembled in Toronto also believed that their newly-formed federation needed to begin publicly charting a new course for the arts in Canada and address the more immediate task of establishing a policy with regard to an artistic war effort. Kingston Conference resolutions had urged the federal government to establish a war records programme but, one year later, nothing had been done on the part of either the federal state or Canadian artists, whose new organization had been in a state of flux until its constitution was ratified. To address these issues, delegates to the Toronto meeting made use of the regional sub-committee structure established by the constitution. Regional committees were established in Montreal, Toronto, and
Vancouver. The Vancouver committee was not given much work and the Toronto committee was vested with responsibility to examine technical questions about the legal status of the arts and artistic standards. Most of the work for the immediate direction of FCA policy fell to the Quebec committee, chaired by Frederick B. Taylor, a painter, etcher, and drawing instructor at McGill University’s architecture school. The Quebec committee was responsible for several key policy areas, including an artistic war effort, the place of the arts in post-war reconstruction policy, and constitutional revisions, if any were needed.\footnote{45}

Taylor was an early and vigorous FCA supporter. The position of authority he occupied in the FCA illustrates the degree to which Canadian artists were willing to work across political boundaries and to consider potentially radical solutions to the problems they confronted. The brother of noted business magnate E.P. Taylor, Frederick had followed a different course out of his upper middle-class family. He had been raised in a conservative family but the Depression had radicalized his social views and, like a range of other young Canadian artists, turned to Marxism in the 1930s.\footnote{46} Taylor originally trained as an architect, and taught himself etching and a variety of other media including painting and drawing.\footnote{47}

Taylor looked on the FCA, and his work within it, as a key opportunity to address the problems of contemporary culture and, in particular, the social and political marginalization of the arts. He was, however, uncertain about the course Bieler and others were charting. The FCA seemed beset with its own problems that impeded its ability to provide an activist centre for the arts in Canada. Membership was low; in Ontario the organization was finding opposition from already established art groups. In other parts of the country, it was completely unorganized to the point where the FCA had virtually no presence in at least one entire province.\footnote{48} In terms of policy, the situation seemed equally bleak. Following a resolution at the Kingston Conference, the executive had issued a war policy statement that urged the government to make use of artists but no effort had been made to indicate what this meant in practice. This was particularly true with regard to French-Canadian artists who, it seems, had paid little attention to the statement.\footnote{49} The executive had also failed to take any steps to establish the national publication called for in the FCA’s constitution, the constitution itself was unwieldy and potentially unworkable, and no effort had been made to begin the process of establishing a post-war policy for the arts in Canada. As an organization, Taylor complained, the FCA seemed to lack both cohesion and direction.\footnote{50} Measured against its ideals, Taylor told Walter Abell as early the Spring of 1942, the state of the FCA was “disappointing and sickening.”\footnote{51}

Abell shared Taylor’s views. While the FCA continuing committee presented a united front in public, what transpired behind the scenes was another matter. Like Taylor, Abell tended to look to capitalist political-economy as the root cause of artistic problems.\footnote{52} He had, Abell told Taylor, had wanted to shape the FCA into a more vibrant body but his position was a minority view: “other members of the committee […] felt it was better to let the thing grow up by the ideas of various regional groups.”\footnote{53} The result was that they were unwilling to provide central direction. Abell did not criticize any specific executive members and that may not have been his point. Like Taylor, what concerned him was the seeming inability of the new organization to fulfill the objectives for which it had been established. Arthur Lismer, who also served on the Quebec regional sub-committee shared this view. In a long letter to Bieler in mid-1942, he outlined what he viewed as a series of key problems, including the executive’s failure to communicate with members, what he saw as the new organization’s complete lack of social consciousness, poor policy design,
and a failure to make use of artists who were interested in contributing to the Federation and its policies. For his part, Taylor was most frustrated with Bieler in whom he seems to have initially placed considerable confidence. He believed the general lack of policy and direction discredited the FCA. The FCA, Taylor told Bieler, could be the strong voice Canadian artists needed. It held immense potential to serve as a catalyst for wider changes in cultural policy. Its current status, however, made it impossible for the organization to play this role.

Art, Society, and War

No where were the FCA’s problems more evident than in its efforts to organize an artistic war effort. This was one of the areas for which Taylor’s Quebec sub-committee had assumed responsibility at May 1942 Toronto meeting that elected Bieler president and ratified the organization’s constitution. The Quebec section had organized a petition urging the federal government to use the capacities of artists in the war effort and secured over nine hundred signatures. In Taylor’s view, the war effort was one of the opportunities that the FCA was missing because it provided a perfect opportunity for the arts in Canada to use creative activity in a socially meaningful way. By demonstrating the socially meaningful work the arts could do in time of war, Taylor believed, the arts could illustrate the merits of artistic social re-integration and begin the process of bridging the gap between the arts and society.

Taylor had taken this objective seriously on a personal level; his own actions illustrate one potential way he felt the arts could bridge the gap between themselves and society. He spent the latter half of the war painting industrial production scenes and workers in war industries. Industrial war art, he argued, served as a model of socially engaged and productive art. He believed it could make an immediate contribution to Canada’s war production. One of Canada’s main contributions to the war, he argued, was industrial production. By using industrial production as a source of artistic inspiration, artists could help workers gain a greater sense of their significance and the contribution they were making. In effect, Taylor seemed to believe that the social importance of industrial work could be elevated by making it the subject of artistic interpretation. The artistic interpretation of work, he believed, was different from propaganda, of which he was not in favour because, in his view, propaganda did not recognize the importance of work but instead looked to manipulate the worker. In this, he believed it was of little effect. By contrast, the use of art indicated the importance of workers to cultural development.

Over a period of years, Taylor tried to interest the federal government in establishing an industrial war arts programme, with little effect. What was important from the point of view of Taylor’s interaction with the FCA, however, was that the organization took no public stand on industrial war art and few other artists followed his example. In fact, exactly what constituted an artistic war effort proved much less clear in the minds of other artists and the FCA executive then it did for Taylor. The petition Taylor’s sub-committee organized made significant claims on behalf of the arts. The use of art in the war effort, the petition explained, would promote national unity, contribute to the war’s success, encourage a “healthy spirit” among workers, help reduce industrial accidents, and could even stimulate attention to diet. To accomplish these aims, the petition recommended that artists be used in some official capacity in factories and on military bases, “in accordance with special talents they may have.” It did not explain these special talents and specific recommendations were vague. The FCA believed that artists could be used to decorate union halls and nurseries and used to carry out unspecified “educational work” among unions. Its key proposal was that the
government create a commission consisting of government officials and FCA members to determine the precise details of an artists war effort. In effect, the FCA was recommending that the government create a commission to figure out what the members of the FCA should actually be doing. What was more significant, and was perhaps the FCA’s real objective, was that this commission would not expire at war’s end. Instead, it would be reconstituted as a federal ministry of fine arts.60

The petition -- and, as a result, what was really the sum total of the FCA’s war programme – met with little success. The FCA executive tied the success of its petition and artists war effort policy to obtaining a personal interview with Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Their plan was for Bieler to lead a small delegation of artists to meet King, discuss their ideas and proposals, and explain the philosophy behind them.61 Neither King nor his staff, however, had much interest in meeting with a group of artists and even less in discussing the philosophy of art. Brooke Claxton, Member of Parliament for the Montreal riding where Taylor lived, and one of the key advocates of the arts in the federal government, conveyed the FCA’s messages to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO).62 Claxton told Taylor directly that the FCA’s proposals were too vague for the PMO. He urged the Federation to revise their petition into a concrete proposal that isolated specific problems, indicated how these problems could be addressed, and provided a plan for the implementation of change. FCA proposals, he said, should also cite specific examples to illustrate their points. If the FCA did obtain a meeting with the Prime Minister, his Principal Secretary Walter Turnbull told Taylor, that meeting must involve more than simply saying that artists wanted to contribute to the war effort.63

The FCA began its petition drive after its 1942 Toronto meeting. Through the rest of that year and into 1943, the FCA found its overtures to the PMO stalled. In January of 1943, the PMO rejected the idea of a meeting with the Prime Minister but suggested that it might be possible for artists to meet with the defense minister. Taylor originally accepted this idea on behalf of the FCA but soon came to the opinion that even this alternative was not viable. The FCA’s entire approach, Bieler came to realize, had been naïve. In place of a face-to-face meeting, or even a presentation of the petition, he suggested that the FCA mail it to the PMO or the Wartime Information Board, try to garner some publicity from it, and then let the matter rest while they moved on to other things.64

Taylor viewed the FCA’s first interaction with government as a serious defeat for artists, but others members of the executive were less certain. It was clear that the FCA had met with little success but, National Secretary Rik Kettle argued even before the PMO finally rejected the idea of meeting the Prime Minister, this might have been for the best. What would have happened, Kettle wondered, if the FCA petition had been accepted and met with a positive response? The truth of the matter was that the FCA had no way to organize an artistic war effort in Canada. The provincial organizations in British Columbia and Ontario had expressed disinterest in the project while other artists’ organizations, such as the MAA, had started their own programmes on a regional level. In addition, Kettle also wondered out loud about the degree to which Canadian artists were willing to participate in whatever programme was ultimately established. “[T]he whole position,” Kettle told Bieler, “is not so simple as getting the petition accepted. [...] [W]e are not asking the government for jobs for artists but I fear very much that most artist could not and would not leave their present jobs to do war art jobs [...].”65 Kettle also felt that the FCA’s policy did not place enough emphasis on self-organization and self-direction in the arts. “The government,” he told Saskatchewan artist Ernst Lindner, “is not going to be very impressed by an
organization that simply asks for all sorts of things to be done, and apparently shows no signs of doing anything itself.” Said differently: the FCA’s programme appeared more like a wish list than a concrete and specific plan for the arts and Canadian culture. For Taylor the problem was twofold. First, he was deeply and personally committed to the war and wanted to see all sectors of Canadian society do what could be done in its support. Second, he believed the FCA had missed an opportunity to address the wider problems that had led to its creation in the first place. The war afforded an opportunity to bring the arts back into social life. He had pursued these objectives on a personal level through his industrial war art. Kettle did not disagree with these objectives but his cooler response to the failure of the FCA’s war effort petition indicated that the ways in which FCA objectives were understood varied considerably among its members.

The Cultural Politics of Accommodation

In the wake of its war policy failure, the FCA turned to other matters. Two issues were of particular importance: institutional organization and the place of the arts within post-war reconstruction policy. Institutional organization was a key problem because, key members believed, its current structure made it impossible for the FCA to organize the arts in support of an activist agenda. Post-war reconstruction policy was important because it constituted the next opportunity to revise the overall orientation of cultural policy in Canada. Taylor played a key role in the reformation of the FCA’s structure and was a focal point of debates about post-war reconstruction policy. As National Secretary, Kettle worked with Taylor to address FCA weaknesses by expanding membership and refashioning its constitution. The end result of the process was a stronger statement of objectives and a more stream-lined institutional structure that, executive members felt, allowed the FCA to become a more effective organization. Taylor’s Quebec sub-committee working with Kettle produced a set of constitutional revisions that amounted to a new constitution. They abandoned the idea of working sections organized according to media or educational activity in favour of straight regional representation. Local groups were encouraged to take initiatives, while the central office was to act as an information exchange that could also provide financial assistance to local bodies. In effect, the new organization came closer to Bieler’s original plan of using the FCA as an umbrella group that drew local and regional art societies together at the national level for common action. Kettle also worked to promote interchange between the FCA and other existing artists groups, establishing a process through which existing local societies could affiliate with the FCA. This innovation was intended to increase FCA membership without actually having to recruit members. By early 1943, the effects were already evident, as FCA membership had risen to 400. To streamline the organization, the proposed new constitution instituted classes of membership with regional executives given final authority to determine into which class membership applications fell.

What was more important than structure were organizational objectives. In the minds of many members, the FCA’s purpose remained vague. “I feel,” Kettle wrote to RCA President L.A.C. Panton, “that we have not yet begun to discuss the fundamental problems that […] concern the position of the artists and craftsman after the war.” “Are we,” he asked, “interested in merely an extension of the present situation, where most of us teach etc., and sell an occasional picture, or are we interested in the artists finding a new place in a new post war world[?]” The fact that artists were still wondering about their social roles and functions, Kettle told Bieler, was a clear indication that they are “not yet sure how to
go about functioning.” For Pearl McCarthy, editor of the FCA’s Ontario regional newsletter, this issue was fundamental. “Artists find one dominant and not so easily settled problem of grand strategy,” she wrote in 1943. “If our country is to have more space for real values such as art, where do we begin to weave them into life? People speak of ‘getting the world by the tail’ but often find that […] the world has no tail by which it can be grasped.” McCarthy viewed this issue as not only the concern but the responsibility of the artist. A new social place and role for the arts, she argued in other circumstances, would come to reality only through the arts themselves.

The FCA approached this issue in both a general and a specific way. On the general level, the FCA recast the war as a period of marked change in Canadians’ social consciousness. The collective nature of the war effort and the values in the name of which it was being fought, the FCA suggested, would lead to a new culture in Canada built around a new cultural policy. The questions were where artists fit in this new culture and how would a new cultural policy affect them? “The trend of present day democracy,” one 1943 FCA position paper stated, “points to a form of social order in which art will enter more fully into the common life.” On the specific level, the FCA argued that a restructured National Gallery provided the means to accomplish this goal. The FCA took it as axiomatic that the National Gallery constituted the central artistic institution in Canada; post-war cultural policy needed, therefore, to be realized through this institution. The FCA’s first post-war policy plan called for a massive increase in federal spending on the National Gallery in order to develop a comprehensive extension system that linked smaller local and regional galleries to the national center. In communities where there were no art galleries, the FCA plan called for the creation of NGC branch galleries. Exhibitions could then be circulated across the country through this web of interconnecting galleries. The proper storage and maintenance of artworks required further spending and the FCA argued for a new system of art scholarships to further advanced training and for more attention to be devoted to art education in general. Perhaps the most innovative proposal was for a system of arts field workers who could examine the cultural conditions in communities across the country and make recommendations to improve local artistic and cultural conditions.

The FCA’s first venture into post-war planning adopted a model of artistic development that was, in important ways, different from its constitutional focus on vibrant local arts societies supported by a central umbrella group. In place of this decentralized and “grassroots” model, initial FCA post-war planning looked to an institutionally centralized model run through the NGC. The FCA justified this plan, in part, with reference to what it viewed as its potentially positive effects on national identity and, in part, with reference to the ideal of cultural and social holism that, it believed, followed from the closer integration of art and life. In fact, FCA discourse constructed the two aspects of its proposed new arts policy as inseparable. “Art,” the same FCA policy document read, “is an integrating element in all phases of our social activity.” Through this centralized system of art institutions, art would forge links between the diverse elements of Canada’s population.

Not everyone within the FCA supported this plan. Behind the scenes, Frederick Taylor was working out his own ideas about the most effective approach for the Federation to address the problematic relationship between art and life. In February 1944, he circulated a draft of his ideas to the FCA executive. Entitled “A Policy and Programme for the Federation of Canadian Artists”, Taylor’s document began by recounting the original objectives of the Kingston Conference. The FCA had been created, it read, because existing arts societies were unwilling or unable to deal
with the crucial issues of the day confronting the arts. Two things, it continued, needed to be accomplished if the status of the artist in society were to change. First, all artists needed to work together as a united front. In this regard, Taylor’s draft policy urged the FCA to begin a large-scale membership drive. Second, he argued that meaningful cultural change required political activism.

If the status of the artist in society is to be improved the state of society has to change. Artists are potentially the most articulate group in the community; progressive political parties appreciate this fact, and are accordingly taking steps to win the support of artists. Politicians know that they must earn that support, and they are prepared to earn it. Ultimately, artists will have to agree upon “en bloc” support of the single political party most sympathetic to their cause, and support it with all their force until it attains power.\(^75\)

In his plan, Taylor did not specify the party to which he was referring, but there was little doubt about his own political sympathies and the political direction in which he felt artists should move. He urged the FCA to develop a more strictly labour union format and to consider affiliation with the Canadian trade-union movement. The FCA, he wrote, needed to dedicate itself to improving society. If it was unwilling to commit itself to social and political activism, he stated bluntly, its members’ time was better spent on their own projects or working on a local level.\(^76\)

Taylor’s views were echoed by at least some other activists on the Canadian left. A number of Canadian communists found recent developments on the Canadian art scene impressive. Lucille Giscome, for example, argued in the Canadian Tribune that Canadian artists had begun to reconsider the character and scope of artistic work. In the 1930s, Canadian leftists had been particularly vocal in their criticism of Canadian art and what they viewed as its social detachment. In particular communists faulted Canadian painters for their preoccupation with landscape and concomitant neglect of social issues.\(^77\) This situation, at least according to Giscome, was changing because artists had become more ideologically engaged and more interested in the relationship between art and society. Evidence of this shift, she said, could be found in the return of the human figure to Canadian art. In effect, what impressed Giscome was the distance Canadian artists had begun to establish from the nationalist landscapes of the 1920s. Such a distance, in the view of Canadian communists, suggested a new interest in society and illustrated a “new growth” on the part of the arts in Canada.\(^78\) Within the FCA, however, Taylor’s ideas were at first ignored; then contested.

Through the course of 1944, the FCA began to collaborate with other artists’ organization and to add to its original plans. In the Spring of 1944, new RCA President Ernest Forsey called together representatives of various arts bodies in Canada in an effort to work out a common policy for the post-war era. Forsey’s conference led to the formation of the Canadian Artists Liaison Committee, which later became the Canadian Arts Council. It also established the framework for what became an artists’ brief to the federal commission on reconstruction.\(^79\) The brief that was presented in June of that year adopted a similar discourse of social engagement and cultural democracy that Walter Abell had developed at the Kingston Conference. It rejected the idea of art as an elitist luxury separated from social life, arguing instead that art should be linked to society and federal policy should be designed to facilitate this ideal. The best means to achieve this aim, the artists brief argued, was through the new institution of community centres.\(^80\) While the idea of
community centres likely did not arise within the FCA, the organization’s executive was fascinated by what they viewed as their potential. Lawren Harris, who had replaced Bieler as president, urged the rest of the executive to support the idea. Community centres, he believed, provided the most effective means to improve the quality of life in Canada. The modern age, Harris argued in a discourse that bore strong affinities to that developed in the 1930s to explain the social detachment of art, was characterized by increased social regimentation and expanded bureaucratic power. The community centre provided the means for ordinary citizens to develop their creative faculties in a life that was otherwise defined by conformity and standardization. “Herein,” Harris wrote in his defense of the community centre idea, “we see a latent possibility of opposition between a nation-wide organization of economic control or the regimentation of an all-pervading government on one hand, and on the other, the freedom essential to the creative life.” For Harris, attention to the creative needs, as much as to the material needs, of citizens was a mark of a nation’s level of civilization. The community centre was to be a site of artistic and creative activity. It would be a location for art lessons and public lectures and would serve, as well, as an adult education centre. It would house book and film libraries, fine arts and dance studios, as well as exhibition rooms. As President, Harris made community centres an FCA priority and used his position to publicize the ideas in the artists’ brief.

Taylor supported the community centre idea, but it appears more out of loyalty and his desire for an artistic united front than a sincere belief in their potential. He felt that there was nothing inherently wrong with community centres but also believed they detracted from more important issues. “I judge,” he wrote the sculptor Elizabeth Wyn Wood, “that the broader aspects of art in society […] are being lost sight of […]” For Taylor, this distraction was potentially significant because he felt the post-war reconstruction period offered artists a second opportunity to begin a process of historic change. “[T]he importance of the present opportunity,” he told Wyn Wood in the same letter, “to achieve immense progress in the whole matter of getting the arts and artists back into life, can hardly be exaggerated.” What was required was a broad and radical perspective. “I believe that a unique and great opportunity to strike a blow for the whole of culture in the whole of Canada, will be irretrievably lost if the broadest possible conception of the place of the arts in life is not included in the [artists’] brief.” For her part Wyn Wood agreed. The Federation, she told him, had become fixated on community centres “as the be-all and end-all” of cultural development.

While he did not publicly break with the FCA, Taylor decided to take a more aggressive and politicized approach to community centres that was in keeping with his increased focus on politicized activism as the key to cultural change. Where Harris supported publicity efforts and lobbying government, Taylor directly contacted politicians in the Montreal area and asked them, in view of the up-coming election, whether or not they were supportive of the artists’ position. He also emphasized what he viewed as the political nature of cultural policy in speeches to Montreal community groups. He described his approach to Kettle after he spoke to the Montreal local of the Canadian Authors Association (CAA). “I pulled no punches. I brought politics right into their horrid little lives and made them like the idea that they might just as well lie down and let the sod be thrown upon them if they don’t wake up and do something.” “[A] whole lot of good,” he concluded, “is resulting.”

To what extent this was true was a matter of perspective. The CAA’s local secretary told Taylor that his speech had, in fact, done the opposite, upsetting members of the local as opposed to galvanizing them. What they believed, she said, was that
Taylor had been advocating political affiliation on the part of artists. After he left, she told Taylor, she had had to reassure members that this was not FCA policy and that the organization aimed to win the support of all parties for its agenda. The secretary was right about FCA policy but wrong about Taylor's views. Since at least April 1944, Taylor had been openly discussing what he viewed as the connection between art and politics. Taylor could recognize and even accept the merits of depoliticized public good arguments, but he also focused on what he described as the “progressive” nature of the relationship between art and society. By 1945 he was openly linking the “progressive” nature of art to the degree to which it associated with the labour movement, the view he had articulated internally the year before. “The realization of the artists’ proposal,” he wrote in one article on the subject, “depends upon the defeat of the same anti-progressive forces which obstruct all social progress, of the interests that oppose such measures as family allowances [and] health insurance […]”.

Taylor’s views on political activism and the problems artists’ confronted assumed that there was an inter-dependence between art and organized labour. Both art and labour, Taylor wrote Robert Ayre, the editor of Canadian Art, were marginalized by the capitalist economic system. In this sense, both were necessarily opposed to capitalist social values and, hence, could make common cause. For both art and labour, progress meant opposition to capitalism. If the condition of artists were to improve, if art were to again become socially meaningful, it needed to connect with life. This did not mean, he later explained to a left-wing journalist, that the job of artists was to provide propaganda for the political left, much less to serve as a leadership van-guard for the working class. The best course of action was for artists to work with labour to develop and articulate alternative systems of cultural values. To accomplish the aim, Taylor believed that the FCA needed to make further changes. He found its current policy orientation frustratingly cautious. In its current form, he told Lawren Harris, the FCA needed to recognize that it simply could not bring enough pressure to bear on government to push it toward meaningful cultural change. The best course of action, Taylor now believed was to dissolve the Federation and work with the Canadian Artists Liaison Committee, as the broader, more encompassing and hence more influential body the arts needed. Moreover, this broader framework needed to include people other than artists. As he later wrote to Harris, Canadian artists should “openly and closely align ourselves with those with whom we logically have the most in common, the masses of the people […]”.

Other leading members of the FCA were not sure of how to respond to Taylor’s proposals. Some, such as Ernst Lindner, Chairman of the FCA’s Saskatchewan regional section, opposed them for their own political reasons. Lindner looked on labour as a self-interested part of society with which he seems to have wanted little to do. Moreover, Lindner suggested it was the character of art to transcend social divisions. In this sense, Lindner seemed to suggest, art was not tied to any particular social perspective. In Taylor’s view, Lindner’s position smacked of cultural elitism and he found such an artistic philosophy socially meaningless in any practical sense. In his view, he replied, the arts needed to understand “the necessity of realistic action” to transform their ideals into reality. Others acknowledged Taylor’s ideas had merit. Taylor’s plan to dissolve the FCA into the Canadian Artists Liaison Committee, Rik Kettle wrote Lawren Harris, did, in fact, reflect the spirit of the ideas discussed at the original Kingston Conference. In another letter, Kettle referred to Taylor’s plan “big, bold, extremely well thought out […] and in very many ways it is the kind of thing that should be done.” He opposed it, however, because he was not sure the plan would work and he thought political activism
gambled a great deal. Quite simply, Kettle believed the risk was too great. Harris opposed Taylor’s proposal on other grounds. The problem with Taylor’s proposal, Harris felt, was that it did not consider artists’ audience. It was, he said, strong on “producer appeal” but neglected to consider the consumer.

FCA policies had, in fact, become increasingly concerned with the art consumer as World War II drew to a close. In supporting the idea of community centres, Harris mobilized a discourse of cultural alienation that stultified human creativity. For ordinary working Canadians, the community centre supposedly drew art into their lives by establishing a space for their own creativity: for art education, artistic practice, or learning. In this sense, the FCA’s programme was concerned with creativity on the level of the ordinary Canadian. The new focus on consumerism moved in a different direction. In the Fall of 1945, the newly-formed Ottawa FCA branch announced that it had entered into an agreement with a local department store to maintain a gallery “for the sale and rental of pictures by contemporary Canadian artists.”

Taylor’s own Quebec had also begun to run exhibitions aimed at expanding the demand for art.

The FCA’s new focus on artistic consumerism illustrated how differently the issue of arts’ relationship to society could be understood by members of the same organization. Where Taylor looked to find ways for the arts to work in common with “progressive” social forces to help construct a new cultural order, other FCA members turned to marketing in an effort to achieve a wider diffusion of art within society while solidifying the economic position of the artist. In the 1930s, the forefront of Canadian artistic criticism and artists social organization identified the development of the modern economy as the key problem confronting the arts. Within this framework, Walter Abell, Marius Barbeau and others had isolated consumerism as a particularly corrosive cultural dynamic that the arts needed to overcome in order to achieve social re-integration. This point was re-emphasized at the Kingston Conference and in the initial FCA programme. As World War II ended, the FCA shifted ground and embraced the consumerism of art, among other initiatives, as its solution to the social detachment of the arts. For Taylor, this shift was deeply disappointing. “The FCA,” he wrote to Kettle, “was organized and constituted to fulfil a need, to do work that no existing artists’ organizations were organized and constituted and/or able and included to do.” By early 1946, he believed it had abandoned its historic opportunities, elected to “go into business” and had become “just another artists’ organization.” Others accepted that Taylor was right and the FCA had changed direction. For Rik Kettle this was not a problem. The FCA may not be doing the job it had been created to do, he told Harris in late 1945, but had now adopted a new mission which, he felt, was at least equally valuable.

In the face of the FCA’s new direction, and confronted with either hostility or unsupportive sympathy from other members of the executive, Taylor withdrew. He resigned from the FCA executive and left the organization freer to chart an a-political and consumerist course to artistic engagement that he felt powerless to prevent. “I should like to be able to explain my philosophy to you,” Taylor had written to Robert Ayre in the Fall of 1945, "but the gulf seems almost impossible.”

Activism and Accommodation

Taylor’s self-imposed eclipse within the FCA drew one chapter of its history to a close. History admits no straight-forward lessons that can be mobilized in the present. The lessons taken away from the early history of the FCA depend on one’s perspective. For Bieler, the FCA’s history was a story of changing values that led, ultimately, to the creation of a state cultural
infrastructure after World War II. For Taylor, the FCA’s early history was a story of missed opportunities. For Harris and Kettle, the history of the FCA could be written as a history of institutional change in which self-organization addressed the immediate problems confronted by the arts under conditions of modernity. In terms of cultural activism, the organization of the FCA illustrates one way in which artists responded to the problems of modernity. In particular, it illustrates the process of self-organization and cultural activism as a response to social, cultural, economic, and political marginalization. In effect it demonstrates how certain forms of cultural activism were built into the character and structure of Canadian modernity. Activist artists of the 1930s and 1940s were, after all, responding to the problems of modernity that developed despite their desires and in face of concerted efforts to address the same problems. This was a key theme in 1930s cultural criticism: the problems artists confronted related to broader socio-economic, cultural, technological, and political change.

It also demonstrates that exactly where this activism could lead was a controversial issue among artists. As Jeffrey Brison and others have suggested, the course of cultural activism is complicated by policies of state, power relations within society, and ideology.\(^{106}\) What FCA activism demonstrated, as well, was the wider currents of change in the arts. Artistic activism was, at the time, deeply divided. The desire for constructive social engagement could be widely supported but could also take different forms and mean different things to different artists. What is perhaps most telling in this chapter in the institutional history of Canadian art is that a final resolution to the concerns that had dominated artistic thought in Canada since the early 1930s proved difficult to attain. In turning their activism to pragmatic grounds – to community centres, the expansion of galleries, and new means of merchandising art – the artists who organized the FCA both did and did not “solve” the problems that had initially animated self-organization. Instead, what Canadian artists discovered was a way to alleviate the worst effects of artistic social and economic marginalization through state policy, community programmes, and marketing. In effect, the FCA developed a means to effectively mediate their relationship with society, even while root problems of social detachment remained in place.

The relationship between art and society did not disappear as a concern of artists after World War II. Instead, it took different forms and was articulated through other discourses. The rise of the Montreal avant-garde in the late 1940s, for example, was propelled by similar concerns.\(^{107}\) The activists who organized the FCA may have accomplished a great deal within the context of their lives. What they accomplished, however, ensured that artistic activism continued. If their policies addressed immediate concerns and mediated the worst effects of modernity on the arts, the historical processes that triggered activism remained in place. In this sense, the lesson that one might draw from the FCA’s early history is that cultural activism is as endemic to modernity as the problems it seeks to address.
1 André Bieler to H.O. McCurry, 5 February 1941, André Bieler papers Queen’s University Archives [hereafter QUA].

2 André Bieler, “Preface” to André Bieler and Elizabeth Harrison, eds., Proceedings: Kingston Conference (Kingston: 1943), v.


8 Leo Smith, “Music: Some Problems of To-Day” Queen’s Quarterly XXXIX, 3 (August 1932), 476.

9 Ibid., 482.

10 Arthur Lismer, “The World of Art” Canadian Comment (January: 1933),


12 Marius Barbeau, “Quebec Wood Carvers” Dalhousie Review XII, 2 (July 1932), 182. Barbeau wrote: “the independent evolution of collective art in off parts of the world has come to a stop, and given way to centralization.” Such centralization, as Barbeau explained elsewhere, was the bane of an artistically-supportive environment. See also Marius Barbeau, “Two Master Carvers of Ancient Quebec” Dalhousie Review XV (1935-36), 287.


14 Ibid., 187.

15 A.M. Stephens, “Poetry and Economics” Queen’s Quarterly XXXVIII, 1 (Winter 1931), 23-4, where Stephens suggests one of the problems of artists today may be that they were not committed enough to artistic production. They needed, he said, to be willing to pay the price themselves – the cost – of being an artist and that included the economic cost.

16 Ibid., 21.

17 Ibid.
18Graham McInnes, “Canadian Art” Queen’s Quarterly XLV,2 (Summer 1938), 239-44. For similar concerns, see Barbeau, “Two master Carvers of Ancient Quebec”, 287-92, which charts what Barbeau saw as the rise and demise of a French-Canadian architectural tradition.


27National Gallery of Canada, Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1935-36), 9-10

28Graham McInnes, "The World of Art" Saturday Night (7 November 1939), 25.


30Walter Abell, Maritime Art (December: 1940), 18.

31For a thorough discussion of the Group of Seven, see Charles C. Hill, The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995).

32Proceedings, 6-7 and 18; Wyly Grier, "Sociability In Art" Saturday Night (26 July 1941), 15. Former Group of Seven member and soon-to-be FCA activist A.Y. Jackson captured the tone of tributes to the arts when he noted “if we leave any trace of ourselves in history it will not be through the records printed in our blue books, but did we create great music or drama, or literature or through a triumph in research such as Banting's discovery of insulin.” Proceedings, 19.

33Of particular interest to Canadian artists were the Works Project Administration (WPA) and the Public Works of Art Project (PWA).

35Ibid., 8. Bieler also felt that the new federation could contribute to the growth of national identity in Canada, although he did not fully explain why. Instead, he asserted that the active promotion of the arts provided the basis for a Canadian national identity, and left the matter at that. Ibid. 17.

36Ibid., 68.

37 Maritme Art (February-March: 1942), 102

38Proceedings., 37.

39Ibid., 98.

40Ibid., 110 and 118.

41Ibid., 110-5.

42Federation Bulletin [1942], n.p.


47Frederick B. Taylor to D.O.C. D.N.D. Montreal P.Q., 8 September 1939, Frederick B. Taylor Papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to Edmund Dyonnet, 16 October 1933, Frederick B. Taylor papers, NAC.

48Federation Bulletin [1942], 4; “Re: First Annual Meeting of the Federation of Canadian Artists. May 1st and 2nd, 1942” TS in André Bieler papers, QUA; Rik Kettle to Elizabeth [Wyn Wood], 17 November 1942 [copy], André Bieler papers QUA.

49Federation Bulletin [1942, 2nd issue], 4. Frederick B. Taylor to André Bieler, 14 January 1943, André Bieler papers, QUA.

50Frederick B. Taylor to André Bieler, 13 June 1942; Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to Garnard [Rik] Kettle, 7 May 1943, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.
51 Frederick B. Taylor to Walter Abell, 23 January 1942, Frederick B. Taylor papers, NAC.

52 Abell, “Art and Democracy,” 31-2.

53 Walter Abell to Frederick B. Taylor, 12 February 1942, Frederick B. Taylor papers, NAC.

54 Arthur Lismer to André Bieler, 19 July 1942, André Bieler papers, QUA.

55 Frederick B. Taylor to André Bieler, 13 June 1942, André Bieler papers, QUA.


57 Frederick B. Taylor to David Petegorsky, n.d., Frederick B. Taylor papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to John Grierson, 30 May 1943, Frederick B. Taylor papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to C.D. Howe, 24 February 1942, Frederick B. Taylor papers, QUA.

58 Rielle Thomson to Frederick B. Taylor, 16 October 1944, Frederick B. Taylor papers, QUA.


60 Petition, “Au Trés Honorable Premier Ministre du Canada”, André Bieler papers, QUA; André Bieler to Frederick B. Taylor, 7 July 1942, André Bieler papers, QUA; “Resolutions Passed at a meeting of members on 2nd December 1942” TS, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

61 Frederick B. Taylor to André Bieler, 5 July 1942, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.


63 Brooke Claxton to Frederick B. Taylor, 29 July 1942, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to Arthur Lismer, 30 July 1942, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Walter Turnbull to Frederick B. Taylor, 27 October 1942, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Brook Claxton to Frederick B. Taylor, 19 July 1942 [copy], André Bieler papers, QUA.

64 André Bieler to Frederick B. Taylor, 31 January 1943, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

65 Rik Kettle to André Bieler, 19 November 1942, André Bieler papers, QUA.

66 Rik Kettle to Ernst Lindner, 25 January 1943 [copy], André Bieler papers, QUA.

67 Rik Kettle to Robert Bruce, 29 October 1942 [copy]; Rik Kettle to Mr. Fornall, 21 March 1943 [copy]; Rik Kettle to Doris MacPherson, 7 January 1943 [copy]; Rik Kettle to André Bieler, 28 February 1943; Report, “Special National Committee, Montreal, Draft of Proposed Constitution” TS, all in André Bieler papers, QUA.

68 Rick Kettle to L.A.C. Panton, 14 March 1943 [copy], André Bieler papers, QUA.
69 Rik Kettle to André Bieler, 3 July 1943, André Bieler papers, QUA.

70 Pearl McCarthy, “Editor’s Forward” Federation of Canadian Artists: Ontario Regional Bulletin (May 1943), 1.

71 Globe and Mail, 1 July 1944.

72 “A Plan for the Extension of the National Gallery of Canada” TS; André Bieler papers, QUA; Rik Kettle to L.A.C. Panton, 14 March 1943, [copy] André Bieler papers, QUA.


74 “A Plan for the Extension of the National Gallery of Canada.” One interesting point about this proposal that FCA planning documents ignored was the degree to which it was consistent with the National Gallery’s own conception of the role it could plan in Canadian society. Since at least the mid-1930s, National Gallery annual reports had been arguing for a similar type of expansion and for national circulating exhibitions. See National Gallery of Canada, Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1935-36), 6-7.

75 Frederick B. Taylor, “A Policy and Program for the Federation of Canadian Artists” Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

76 See also Frederick B. Taylor, “On Art and Canadian Labour” Canadian Tribune (17 November 1945), 12.


78 Lucille Giscome, “Canadian Artists Show New Growth at Exhibit” Canadian Tribune (22 April 1944), 14. See also Canadian Tribune (4 November 1944), 22 and Canadian Tribune (8 November 1944).


81 This seems clear as there was no discussion of community centres between members of the FCA executive or in FCA policy papers before it began to work with the RCA and other artists organizations. Instead, as noted above, the FCA had been primarily concerned with policies oriented toward extending the importance of the National Gallery as the key Canadian artistic institution.


84 Federation of Canadian Artists, Presidential Newsletter (May 1944).

85 Frederick B. Taylor to Elizabeth Wyn Wood, 23 May 1944, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

86 Elizabeth Wyn Wood to Frederick B. Taylor, 23 June 1944, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

87 Frederick B. Taylor to Rik Kettle, 23 May 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

88 Doris Hedge to Frederick B. Taylor, 23 May [1945], Federation of Canadian Artists paper, QUA.

89 Frederick B. Taylor, “Notes from the Writers’ Artists’ and Broadcasters’ War Council” TS (28 April 1944), 5. Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.


91 Canadian Art was a re-branded Maritime Art moved from its regional location to Ottawa. Abell continued to edit Canadian Art until he left for the United States, after which Ayre took charge of the publication.

92 Frederick B. Taylor to Robert Ayre, 2 September 1945, Robert Ayre papers, QUA.

93 Frederick B. Taylor to Jack Stewart, 28 March 1950, Frederick B. Taylor papers, NAC.

94 Frederick B. Taylor to Lawren Harris, 23 October 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Frederick B. Taylor to Mayerovich, Ayre, Wyn Wood, etc., 28 August 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

95 Frederick B. Taylor to Elizabeth Wyn Wood, 10 October 1945, Frederick B. Taylor papers, QUA.

96 Frederick B. Taylor to Lawren Harris, 31 January 1946, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

97 Frederick B. Taylor to Ernst Lindner, 20 February 1946, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

98 Rik Kettle to Lawren Harris, 25 October 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

99 Rick Kettle to Lawren Harris, 12 November 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA; Rik Kettle to Lawren Harris, 16 November 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

100 Lawren Harris to Rik Kettle, 16 November 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

101 Calais Calvert to Frederick B. Taylor, 6 October 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.
Fred Taylor to Rik Kettle, 20 January 1946, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

Rik Kettle to Lawren Harris, 12 November 1945, Federation of Canadian Artists papers QUA.

Fred Taylor to Rik Kettle, 20 January 1946, Federation of Canadian Artists papers, QUA.

Fred Taylor to Robert Ayre, 2 September 1945, Robert Ayre papers QUA.
