

# THE CANADA COUNCIL ART BANK

William Kirby, Head

## **Introduction.**

The Canada Council is an organization created by Parliament in 1957 to promote the arts in Canada. Its funds come from an annual Parliamentary appropriation, which is supplemented by revenues from an endowment fund and private bequests. With these funds, the Council provides financial assistance and services to both individuals and arts organizations in the performing arts, writing and publishing, the visual and media arts, and architecture.

The Art Bank was created in 1972 by the Canada Council as an innovative complement to its programs of grants to artists. Its main objectives are to provide recognition and direct assistance to professional Canadian artists through the purchase of their work; to present contemporary Canadian art to the public in everyday environments by means of a rental program; and to stimulate the private and corporate collecting of art.

The diversity of the Art Bank collection reflects the desire to recognize the best of current visual expression in Canada, both by well established artists and by those in the earlier stages of their career. Over 13,500 works by more than 1,680 different artists had been purchased as of November 1986. The collection is broadly representative of the various concerns and tendencies in Canadian art since 1970. It contains a wide range of media – paintings, sculpture and installations, fibre works and ceramic sculpture, and works on paper, including graphics, drawings and photographs – which vary greatly in their inspiration, style, and technique.

Purchasing began in 1972, and the following year the Art Bank opened a warehouse to store and display the developing collection. The warehouse was expanded as the Art Bank's activities increased. In 1981, a display space and a Resource Centre were opened as well, and in 1983

space was added to facilitate jurying, cataloguing, photography, conservation, and shipping and receiving. The Art Bank now occupies 2,100 square metres, with a staff of 21 persons.

### **The Purchase Program**

Works are purchased for the Art Bank collection on the recommendation of continuously changing juries, which are appointed by the Head of the Art Bank.

Juries meet quarterly to review all submissions sent to Ottawa. They may recommend studio or gallery visits and/or the purchase of works on paper. Studio and gallery visits are made only upon the recommendation of the Ottawa juries. When enough visits have been recommended for a particular region of the country, new 3-member juries are appointed to travel to the area to consider the purchase of specific works. Each region receives regular, annual visits and the travelling juries always include one member from the area being visited.

Juries are composed primarily of artists' peers, recognized professionals who are respected within their artistic community. In assembling each jury, the Art Bank draws on a wide variety of people from different parts of the country and with different approaches to making art.

The purchasing budget for 1986/87 is \$875,000. From 500 to 700 new works are purchased each year. More than \$10 million has been spent on purchases since 1972.

### **Submission Procedures**

Works purchased for the collection must be by living, professional artists. Artists must be Canadian citizens, or landed immigrants who have lived in Canada for five years as such. The Art Bank does not initiate contact with artists or galleries; instead they must request that work be considered.

The one criterion for the purchase of works for the Art Bank collection is artistic excellence. How quality is defined is determined by each jury based on the collective opinions of its members within the context

of the works under consideration. The possibility of rental is not a factor in the selection process. The collection has been built over the years as the result of the opinions of 400 different jurors.

### **The Rental Program**

The Art Bank collection is accessible to the public primarily through a rental program. Judging from the fact that more than two-thirds of the collection is being rented at any given time, its success is unquestionable. Rental clients in Canada may be federal departments and agencies, municipal and provincial governments, schools, hospitals, airports, or any non-profit institution. In order to avoid the possibility of competition with dealers and commercial galleries, the Art Bank does not make this service available to individuals or private businesses – except outside Canada.

The majority of the rented works are located in such public spaces as lobbies, reception areas, cafeterias and corridors. However, many pieces also are rented for offices and boardrooms. While the goal of the program is to make art accessible to as many people as possible, both staff and visitors alike, considerable care is taken to display works in safe surroundings. In addition, works on paper are framed by the Art Bank to museum standards. The condition of works is regularly monitored and a conservation program ensures that they are maintained in good condition.

Whenever possible, an Art Bank consultant visits clients' premises in order to assess their requirements and the spaces which may be appropriate for the display of art. The art consultant makes a preliminary selection, and the client is invited to review the art consultant's choices and other available works at the Art Bank or at one of the regional rental exhibitions held regularly across the country.

The Art Bank now has as many clients outside the National Capital Region as there are in the area. Works are rented in such diverse and widespread places as a Department of Communications Office in Whitehorse; a college in Abbotsford, B.C.; a hospital in Regina; Cabinet Ministers' offices in Ottawa; Mirabel Airport, Quebec; an office of the Department of Supply and Services in Shediac, N.B.; and

a Taxation Centre in St. John's, Newfoundland. Art Bank works are rented to clients in every major city on Canada as well as to Canadian clients in New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago and elsewhere in the United States.

### **Special Projects and Loans**

In addition to the Rental Program the Art Bank has become a major lending source for public galleries. Works from the Art Bank collection have been part of exhibitions from coast to coast in Canada and around the world. They have been shown in such diverse places as Paris, London, Budapest, Belgrade, Cologne, Hawaii, Alaska, Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica and Japan.

As well as providing hundreds of works a year for specific exhibitions, the Art Bank makes extended loans of some works to public galleries, in each case with the permission of the artist.

### **Special Purchase Assistance Program**

In 1972, the Art Bank established the Special Purchase Assistance Program to generate additional funds in the art market as well as to increase the number of contemporary works in public collections. Under this program, public art galleries, museums and artist-run centres that have shown a commitment to collecting contemporary Canadian art can apply for funds. Works in all media – including film, video and audio – are eligible. Each institution is asked to raise an amount up to \$10,000 outside its regular acquisition budget, which may then be matched by the Art Bank.

Since its inception the Art Bank's Special Purchase Assistance Program has contributed more than \$1 million, which has resulted in more than \$2 million being generated in the art market. As of November 1986, more than 65 different institutions from coast to coast had participated in the program resulting in the purchase of more than 1,400 works.

### **The Repurchase Program**

Since 1977, the Art Bank has made works of art from the collection available for repurchase by the artist. Only works that have been in the

collection for at least three years are eligible. The repurchase price is determined by the original purchase costs, plus a 20% administration fee.

### **Public Programs**

In order to provide greater public access to works from the collection not out on rental or loan, the Art Bank opened its premises to the public on a regular basis in 1981. A volunteer program has been established to provide guides for public tours of the facilities. These docents, selected for their interest and background in Canadian art, have been trained by Art Bank staff and are familiar with Art Bank programs and policies and the collection itself.

These volunteers also assist in the development of the Visual Arts Resource Centre, which contains an ever-growing collection of books and periodicals on contemporary Canadian art, files on artists in the Art Bank collection, and more than 35,000 slides of contemporary Canadian works of art, including all works in the Art Bank collection.

### **Unique Concept**

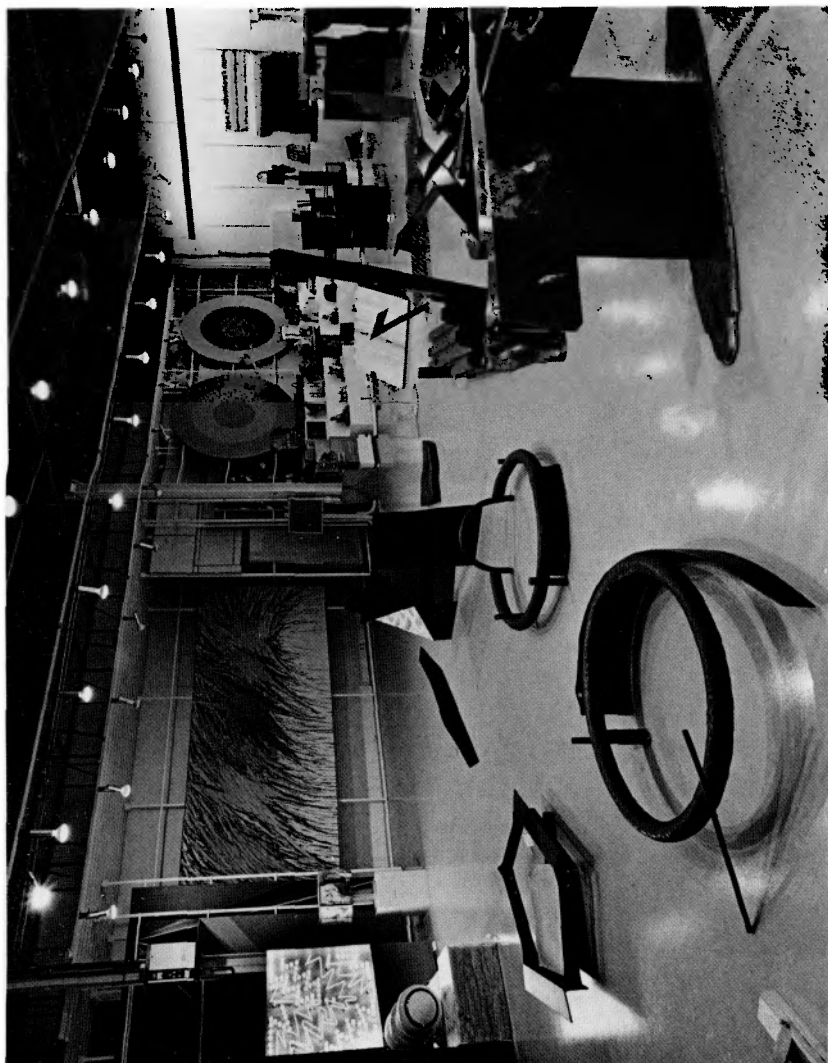
Once unique, the Art Bank has become a model for similar institutions in Australia, New Zealand, Alaska and Florida, as well as in several provinces of Canada. The New England States and the United States federal government also are investigating the implementation of such a program.

The Art Bank has clearly proven to be a successful experiment and has become a vital and integral part of the Canadian art community.

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*Photo 1. Art Bank Warehouse  
(Photo: David Barbour)*



*Photo 2. Art Bank Warehouse  
(Photo: David Barbour)*

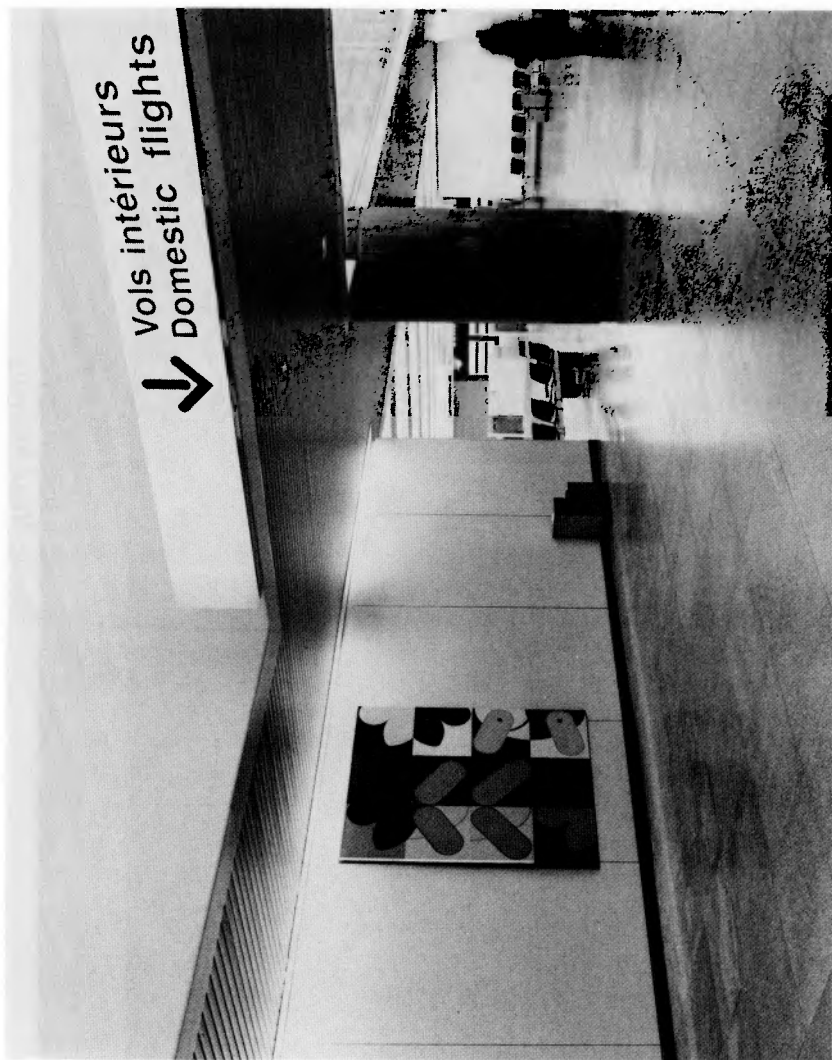


*Photo 3. Art Bank Warehouse  
(Photo: David Barbour)*





*Photo 4. Art Bank Installation  
(Photo: Brian Merrett)*



*Photo 5. Art Bank Installation  
(Photo: Yvan Boulerice)*