

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, August 27, 2018

**NEW ART BOOK SPOTLIGHTS CANADA'S
MOST CONTROVERSIAL AND INNOVATIVE ARTIST OF THE 1930s**

Releasing on September 20, 2018, *Bertram Brooker: Life & Work* examines the art and career of the Governor General's Award-winning novelist, painter, poet, screenwriter, playwright, essayist, copywriter, graphic designer, and advertising executive who dared to take aim at Canada's Group of Seven and the country's art establishment.

TORONTO, ON — In 1929 Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) daringly spoke out against the revered Group of Seven. After growing up in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Brooker moved to Toronto where he met Lawren Harris and the Group of Seven. While sympathetic to the Group's nationalistic vision, he dismissed their focus on wilderness painting as being too narrow and lacking innovation. This sent Brooker on a mission: to establish a brand of Canadian art that was genuinely modern and an alternative to the Group's landscapes. With an eye on international art trends, Brooker created work that can be compared to paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Georgia O'Keeffe who, like him, took up the challenge of painting music. In doing so, he was a pioneer of abstract art in Canada.

In 1931 Brooker became renowned for further controversy when he publicly condemned conservative Canadian views on nudity in art after his painting *Figures in a Landscape* was removed from an Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) exhibition. The reason: his painting depicted the nude torsos of two women. Indignant and heated, Brooker promptly called out the nation's puritanical art scene in his essay "Nudes and Prudes."

Brooker was a self-taught polymath who defied the conventions of his time by taking a multi-pronged approach to artmaking and life. "At a moment when most professionals stuck to one specialty," says Sara Angel, Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute, "Brooker was proficient in numerous areas of expertise, allowing him to become one of the country's most innovative artists, a Governor General's Award-winning novelist, a theatre professional, a provocative journalist and essay-writer, as well as a media executive."

Brooker is significant because his approach to life and work foreshadowed our world today. His relentless exploration of new ways of seeing and painting situates him among this country's most accomplished early modernist painters. In the new book *Bertram Brooker: Life & Work*, available September 13, 2018, author Dr. James King gives this little-talked-about artist his due.

"My interest in Brooker was awakened when I researched and wrote about his troubled relationship with Lawren Harris," says King, a professor of English at McMaster University. "What stands out for me is how this advertising executive worked relentlessly in visual and literary forms to create genuinely modernist art in Canada."

Bertram Brooker: Life & Work will be released September 20, 2018, readable online on the Art Canada Institute's website and available for PDF download.

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ABOUT THE ART CANADA INSTITUTE

The Art Canada Institute (ACI) is a non-profit research organization based at Massey College, University of Toronto. Its Canadian Online Art Book Project, a program that in the last three years has released over 25 books—available in both French and English, free of charge—publishes on key topics in Canadian art history. Launched in 2013, ACI is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive, multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally.

IMAGES

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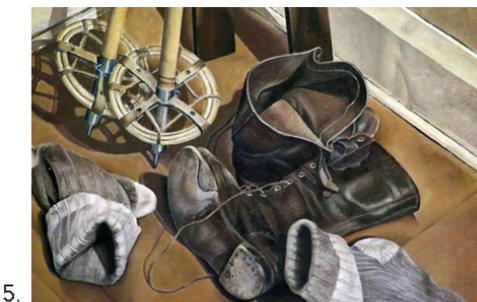
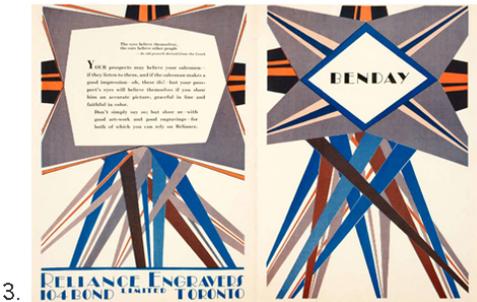


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1. Bertram Brooker, *Kneeling Figure*, 1940. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, Horsley and Annie Townsend Bequest (1973.17). Photo credit: Christine Guest, courtesy of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
2. Bertram Brooker, *The Cloud*, c.1942. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (15815). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.
3. Bertram Brooker, *Benday*, 1928. Bertram Brooker fonds, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Archives, Oshawa (42c). Photo credit: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.
4. Bertram Brooker, *Figures in a Landscape*, 1931. Unlocated. Courtesy of the Estate of Bertram Brooker.
5. Bertram Brooker, *Ski Poles (Ski Boots)*, 1936. Private collection. Photo credit: Alan Klinkhoff Gallery.
6. Bertram Brooker, *Sounds Assembling*, 1928. Collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery (L-80). Photo credit: Ernest Mayer, courtesy of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.
7. Bertram Brooker, *Abstraction, Music*, 1927. Collection of Museum London, F.B. Housser Memorial Collection, 1945 (45.A.47). Photo credit: Museum London.
8. Bertram Brooker, Book jacket design for *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1937. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of Norman Brooke Bell, Patricia Brooke Bell, and Douglas Ambridge Brooke Bell, 2007, in memory of Cicely Barlow Bell (42122). Photo credit: National Gallery of Canada.