

# ANADIAN WOMEN SCULPTORS

JOSEPHINE HAMBLETON\*

SCULPTURE is a language both readily and universally understood because its vocabulary comprises all the myriad types of man's imagination and of his surroundings. All forms denote sensation, feeling, thought. A 1949 Studebaker suggests comfort, travel, speed, but a Haida totem recalls the folk tales of wonder and mystery Haida Indians told about the monoliths that leap cataracts which tumble from Rocky Mountain peaks to the Pacific, about the ravens that shriek through the British Columbia forest depths. All the terrible majesty, loneliness and splendour of our Arctic wastes, rolling steppes, and seas and prairies without end shape the sensitive and pliant substance of our art, whether colonial, primitive or modern. This incomparable natural environment affects even the European artist who looks for the olive trees of Provence whilst strolling beneath maples the autumn has garmented in crimson, copper and gold.

Mère Marie le Maire des Anges was one of our earliest sculptors. She directed the Ursuline convent school at Quebec City from 1672 until she died forty-six years later. Under her direction, sisters and pupils carved, gilded and painted statues, pulpits and choir stalls for Jesuit Missions throughout New France, and from her own hand there yet remains a bas-relief titled "La Vierge Druidique de Quebec" in Ste. Marie de Beauce parish church, near Quebec City. Carved in baroque style, the Madonna wears a French Queen's resplendent mantle and Indian mocassins. In the background, past Quebec citadel, rises the mighty St. Lawrence, ancient as the world. Its lonely horizon is the first artistic expression of that environment that forged the soul of our people—temperate, dreamy and contemplative.

During the XVIII century woodcarving enjoyed its Golden Age in New France. Homes, workshops, furniture, churches, churches, ships, all were of wood. There gradually developed a natural appreciation and genius for woodcarving. French sculptors emigrated, trained apprentices, founded dynasties that have given their names to particular styles. The Baillarge family, for instance, became identified with the gentle Madonnas and baskets of flowers adorning the famous churches around the Island of Orleans. This great epoch closed towards the

\*Of Ottawa; Associate, Slade School Fine Arts, London.

mid-XIX century when industry began manufacturing plaster statues and antique furniture.

About the same time, the Haida Indians developed Canada's most advanced Indian culture. Their carvers turned the themes of legends they illustrated—a raven, a salmon, an eagle—into elements of designs subtle as the modern non-objective. Their canoes had lighter grace than to-day's automobiles. They created their belongings and idols not only for worship and use, but also from the love of forming beautiful patterns and shapes.

With the gaining of Dominion status in 1867, Canada experienced a desire to imitate European culture. Millionaires collected Old Masters. Students made their way to Europe, among them Peterborough-born Katherine Wallis, who entered Auguste Rodin's studio and was eventually elected Member of the Societe Nationale des Beaux Arts.

Miss Wallis' masterpiece "La Lutte pour la Vie," now in the National Gallery at Ottawa, represents a Russian peasant woman holding her baby high above her head in one hand, and battling a wolf with the other. A preliminary marble study for the baby's head called "Inquietude" belongs to the Montreal Art Association.

Now living in the United States, Miss Wallis spent the greater part of her working life in Europe and sympathized with the artists of her time — Jean Francois Millet and Constantin Meunier — who turned to humble life for their inspiration. The same change from religious to lay themes affected the whole course of Canadian art at the close of the XIX century, partly because the Roman Catholic Church no longer patronized artists, and partly because the State was commissioning bronze busts and statues of its eminent servants. The Canadian sculptors who first concerned themselves with the lot of the humble habitant's wife were Alfred Laliberte and Aurele Foy de Suzor Côté, and with the lot of the woman munitions worker, and industrial worker: Frances Norma Loring and Florence Wyle.

## I

Frances Norma Loring was born in Wardner, Idaho, in the United States on 14 October, 1887. Her father, Frank Loring, a mining engineer, worked the mines at Cobalt, Ross-

land and Kirkland Lake. Many years after he died, she wrote: "My father's vision of Canada's future was a great influence upon my faith in the possibilities of Canada's artistic growth."

Miss Loring studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Geneva, under Professor Carl Guttner in Munich, at the Academie Colarossi in Paris, the Chicago Art Institute, the Boston Academy of Fine Arts, and New York Art Students' League. She is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, the Canadian Federation of Artists, the Ontario Society of Artists, Sculptors' Society of Canada and Maritime Arts Council. These organizations have exhibited her work across Canada, and it has also been shown at the Canadian War Memorials Exhibitions held in the National Gallery at Ottawa in 1923 and '24; the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley, in England in 1925; the Canadian Art Exhibition held in Paris in 1927; the Artists of the British Empire Overseas Exhibition held at London, in England, in 1937; a Century of Canadian Art Exhibition held in the Tate Gallery, London, England, the following year; and at the New York World's Fair.

While attending the Chicago Art Institute, she met Florence Wyle. They opened a joint studio in New York in 1910, and three years later, in Toronto. Both were commissioned to portray the role Canadian women played towards winning World War I.

The dignity of manual labour and injustice of society towards its weakest members ever inspire Frances Loring's most dramatic and vigorous sculptures. The earliest, the war records—"Rod Turner", "Girls with Rail", both cast in bronze in the round, and the bas-relief "Noon-Hour in the Munitions Plant"—all in the National Gallery at Ottawa, possess a natural and graceful flow of line, but only suggest the power that the artist was to bring to her "Miner", many years later. Inspired by a mining disaster, this bust depicts merely the man's head. His helmet overhangs a furrowed brow, grim, unsmiling mouth and eyes that are narrowed as though they searched for a disabled comrade amid impenetrable shadows. "Derelicts", in the Toronto Art Gallery, represents a mother trudging along a country road, body tensed against wind and rain, clasping a five-year old daughter to her breast. Sometimes the artist also illustrates conflicts within the soul. "Hound of Heaven"—suggested by Francis Thompson's lines:

I fled Him down the nights and down the days;  
 I fled Him down the arches of the years;  
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
 Of my own mind . . .

showed a woman pause in her fleeing and raise her hand, as though she would forbid the Lord to follow. Symbol of the impenetrable and hostile Arctic, the mother in her famous group "Eskimo Mother and Child" bows her head and broods.

Frances Loring has modelled some outstanding memorials and monuments. Those to the Heroes of the First War stand at Augusta, Maine; St. Stephen's, New Brunswick; Galt, Ontario; Osgoode Hall and in the Hall of the Queen's Own Regiment, Toronto. Her panels "Ontario", symbolizing industrial development and power, and "Quebec", symbolizing the arts, "Day" and "Dawn" adorn the Bank of Montreal, Toronto. "Dawn" rests one arm on the rising sun and shakes the clouds of night from his shoulders. "Day" sends doves winging through the azure, messengers of activity and thought. In the Memorial Chapel, in the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, her "War Widow and Child" stands guard over the door. In the tympanum, a Recording Angel, from the same artist's hand inscribes the names of the Fallen in the Book of Remembrance.

Tourists often admire the animal and bird panels, the panels describing means of transportation throughout the ages, which are set into the walls of the Niagara Falls Park. Perhaps they notice a signature, Frances Loring, but little realize the artist lives not far away, and is probably studying her favorite cat, analyzing its posture, trying to figure out a more expressive manner of interpreting its lazy grace, working as she has steadily during the past forty years.

## II

In the Loringwyle's studio, as their joint studio in Toronto has become affectionately nicknamed by fellow-sculptors, plaster casts lie scattered over tables, chairs, shelves, the floor, everywhere. Some are portrait busts; some, ornamental plaques and bas-reliefs patterned with the birds, animals and flowers of the Canadian woods.

While we conversed there, one afternoon, Florence Wyle modelled a girl's head which greatly resembled her own—round face, short nose, eyes set wide apart. The mouth was

very sad, and compassion sat enthroned on the broad forehead. I enquired whether she ever modelled directly from nature, and the artist replied:

Not usually, although I have often done so in the past, and constantly observe nature. Take the human body, the oldest symbol for the expression of thoughts and feelings in the history of art. You copy different models for years and eventually gain an instinctive knowledge of anatomy. It then becomes fatally easy to make your statue a copy of the model, rather than a symbol for your ideas. Generally, I design the statue first, get the idea and movement, then compare the statue with a model to avoid anatomical errors.

At the sculptor's invitation, I spent the night in the studio. My couch lay beneath a skylight, and when the moon rose, its pale light brought the whole room to life. A harvester drank thirstily from his water-jug, and a nymph upholding a shallow bowl recalled Homeric legends. A negress lifted her face in anguished supplication, and the plaster face of the famous Canadian painter, Alexander Jackson, smiled benignly down from a shelf at all these creatures of Florence Wyle's imagination.

Born in Trenton, Illinois, in 1881, Florence Wyle first studied medicine at Illinois State University and then entered the Chicago Art Institute, where she spent six years and became assistant to her Professor of Sculpture, Charles Mulligan. She designed the Edith Cavell Monument in Toronto and exhibited at the British Empire Exhibitions held in Wembley, England 1924 and '25; the Exhibition of Canadian Art held in Paris in 1927; the Exhibition by Artists of the British Empire Overseas held in London, England, in 1937; the Century of Canadian Art Exhibition held at the Tate Gallery in London, England in 1938; the New York World's Fair in 1939. She is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy, the Sculptors' Society of Canada, the Ontario Society of Artists, and the Potters' Guild of Canada.

Florence Wyle is represented in the National Gallery at Ottawa by "Farm Girl"—a bronze figure of a girl wearing farm clothes, which was executed for the War Memorials Collection—and by "Cellist", an extremely sensitive wood-carving.

### III

The National Film Board of Canada staged the opening scenes of the documentary movie "Third Dimension" in Jac-

obine Jones' immense, white-walled studio in Toronto. She kept very few casts, but one day when we were chatting there, drew back the curtains surrounding a turntable and revealed the half-formed clay figure of a girl.

"That's the Frog Princess," she explained. The maiden wore braids looped between ear and ear, charmingly lowered her almond-shaped eyes. Then the artist showed her bronze trophy "Highfield Dreaming Master", named for a famous Canadian bull, which the Agricultural College at Guelph award their best student in cattle husbandry every year. Miss Jones exhibited this trophy with the "Century of Canadian Art" shown at the Tate Gallery, London, England, in 1938. In contrast to its literalness, a small terracotta group called "Refugees" revealed all the beauty and power of the commonplace. The Refugees were the Holy Family. The donkey grazed peaceably. Mary's cloak trailed in the long grasses. The affection that bound Joseph and Herself to the Baby was manifested not only in their humble faces but also in grandly conceived forms that seemed to grow outwards from the centre of the design—the Child—multiply, embrace the little procession and reverberate like the echo of a musical note.

Jacobine Jones was born in England and trained at the Regent Street Polytechnic under Harold Brownsword. She came to Canada and settled here in 1932.

Jacobine Jones' stone-carving is without equal in Canada. Her chisel releases energy within the stone and gives it form. Carved in Belgian black marble and exhibited at the New York World's Fair, her "Black Cavalry"—a Nubian warrior astride his horse—recalls a Mestrovic. The Kelvin Museum in Glasgow, Scotland, owns "Saint Joan". The girl's modest demeanour bespeaks the generous heart. Gracefully, her mantle falls from her shoulders over her charger's heavy flanks. Carved in Indiana limestone, "Our Lady of Mercy and the Three Generations of Man" surmounts Our Lady of Mercy Hospital, Toronto. The Madonna stretches her arms protectingly over an old man, a young mother and a baby. The forms accord with the architectural setting, and indeed Jacobine Jones' effort has helped bring Canadian architectonic sculpture to its present unsurpassed level of taste and competence.

Jacobine Jones has executed many commissions for Marani, Lawson and Morris, a Toronto architects' firm to whose patronage must largely be credited the tremendous contemporary development in Canadian sculpture. Among her commissions

have been three Amazons in colored plaster over the doorway of the Directors' Room in the Gore District Fire Insurance Building at Galt, Ontario; seven bronze bas-reliefs representing Industry, Fisheries, Agriculture, Electricity, Mining, Forestry and Construction for the Bank of Canada, Ottawa; and ten stone bas-reliefs for the Bank of Montreal, Toronto. The last are Alberta, British Columbia, Calm, Storm, Skunk, Walrus, Polar Bear, Buffalo, Beaven and Wolves.

Where the sculptors Frances Loring and Florence Wyle choose Canadian animals, flowers or characters for their themes, and the impersonality of Elizabeth Wyn Wood's landscapes suggests the boundless arctic wastes, the feeling in Jacobine Jones' work is always Nordic rather than Canadian.

#### IV

In 1903, Elizabeth Wyn Wood was born at Orillia, in the wild Ontario lake country that formed her imaginative vision and infuses all her masterpieces with nostalgic loneliness.

"At five years of age, some one asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up . . . in all seriousness, I replied that I was going to make 'those things' and pointed to a photograph we had of the Athena attributed to Pericles. That was the first time I heard the word 'sculptor' used. I said, 'Yes, sculpture'. But I didn't make figures in my infancy. I made rocks and trees in plasticine, and sometimes even made more infantile landscapes, such as volcanoes with houses tumbling into the brink of the chasm."

Elizabeth Wyn Wood was sent to St. Mildred's College in Toronto, and trained at the Ontario College of Art and New York Art Students' League. She has exhibited with the Sculptors' Society of Canada at the National Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa; at the Century of Canadian Art Exhibition held in England in 1938; at the New York World's Fair, held the following year; the Artists of the British Empire Overseas Exhibition held in London, England in 1937; and has been Canadian delegate to a Conference of UNESCO held in Paris.

She married Emmanuel Hahn, her Professor of Sculpture at the Ontario College of Art, shortly after her graduation. They spent their honeymoon roaming through the Ontario wilderness. They pitched tent on bare rock. The young woman, imagination fired by the surroundings, sketched cedars, solemn and pompous amid gracile birches, geese spreading

their wings in flight, pines overhanging sombre and motionless pools. The sculptures Nature had fashioned throughout this brooding land—the tongues of rock that jutted forward into solitary lakes, and trees that swayed in the wind—seemed to her more sublime than any fashioned by human hands and she returned to her childhood obsession—carving “rocks and trees”.

In 1929, she won the Governor General's award for sculpture with “Passing Rain”, a pane cut in Osera stone. A pine dipped its crest to the winds and rain. “Reef and Rainbow” elicited very high praise from all critics when shown at the National Gallery in Ottawa in 1935 and '36, the Century of Canadian Art Exhibition held at the Tate Gallery in England in 1938, and the New York World's Fair in 1939. Cast in the round, this represented a rainbow arching its glory over a storm-darkened lake. One end touched jagged reefs but the other rested on a black basalt base. The fluidity of the tin was admirably suited to the expression of an ephemeral splendour, and the ebony to that of black and angry waters.

When Mere Marie le Maire des Anges carved “La Vierge Druidique de Quebec,” she suggested the infinite loneliness of the boundless horizons on this continent. She gave plastic form to a concept of infinite psychological dimension—divine love. But Elizabeth Wyn Wood, starting from the concept of lonely and infinite horizons, pressed the artist's vision further into expressing the concept of infinite space, and the real protagonists in her “Reef and Rainbow” and “Passing Rain” were not the trees, the rocks, the waves but the chaos, whence emerged the rocks and the heavens, through which, like thistle-down, the clouds were blown.

“Inspired by the rugged North Ontario scenery, her compositions make Canadians feel she is the initiator of the creative expression of their environment and temperament” the *Canadian Forum* once commented. “In their plastic form and design, they appear to symbolize qualities of cold boldness and endurance.”

The grim determination that enabled a few immigrants to turn the prairies into the granary of the world finds expression in Elizabeth Wyn Wood's “Linda”, a statue that Bertram Brooker, Canadian artist and writer, presented to the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Legs apart, hands locked behind her back, the heavy jowled woman stood facing the stubble and rock. In contrast “Man and Woman”, carved in Saravezza marble,



was an extremely lyrical work. The man knelt, head bent, before his helpmate. Head thrown back, she laid one hand on his breast, and the other on his shoulder. Artificialities shorn from these two souls, they stood before Truth and before one another.

Elizabeth Wyn Wood, together with Frances Loring, Florence Wyle and Jacobine Jones, has largely contributed to Canada's present phenomenal development in architectural sculpture. She designed the panels Manitoba and Saskatchewan for the Bank of Montreal, Toronto, and the War Memorial at Welland, Ontario. In the Niagara Falls Park she suited her fountains to their setting. At the centre of one—broad, shallow, circular—she set three squat owls, back to back, shoulders hunched. Elaborating detail nowhere, she cut forms essential merely to show their wings close drawn about their bodies. At the centre of a taller fountain, she stood three stone salmon on their tails, and into a garden wall carved three geese, wings outspread, heads stretched upwards.

Restlessly Elizabeth Wyn Wood has experimented with new materials, new forms, new designs. The remoteness and the stylization of her sculpture have the haunting beauty and the nostalgia of the most sensitive Haida legends carved in black rock.

## V

“My purpose is to render the emotional significance of an idea through a rhythmic composition of line, form and space,” Sybil Kennedy remarked while we examined her statues. “Sometimes, when I find my work becoming too close an imitation of nature, I work on purely abstract shapes for a few months.” She has realized the vision William Hogarth set forth in his *Analysis of Beauty*. Beginning with the statement, attributed to Michelangelo, that a statue “should always be made Pyramidal, Serpentine”, Hogarth argued that the design of a beautiful work of art suggested this movement, and should therefore be flame-like. His concept implies that the geometric structure underlying the portrait of a head, for instance, is more important than a correct delineation of the head, and it is now the accepted basis of modern art. Using this principle, Sybil Kennedy has expressed the most intense spiritual experiences of the human soul in a sensitive and contemplative manner unequalled in our art history. Her “Saint

Francis of Assissi" contemplates with humility and goodness a flower that his hands cup.

Born in Quebec City, the artist studied under William Brymner at the Montreal Art Association and under Alexander Archipenko in New York City. Since 1925, she has been living and working in New York City, where she is Director of the New York Society of Women Artists and has been awarded three prizes by the National Association of Women Artists of the United States. She has held two one-man shows in New York City and exhibited at the National Academy of the United States; the New York World's Fair; the Art Institute of Chicago; the National Sculpture Society and National Association of Women Artists, both in the United States; at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; at the Art Association of Montreal; the Toronto Art Gallery, and with both the Sculptors' Society of Canada and the Contemporary Arts Society in Montreal.

The Montreal Art Association owns her "Sermon", a small bronze representing a man, his wife and their little girl dozing through a sermon. The little girl, tam slanted over her curls, dozes beside her prim mother who wears a straight dress, plain bonnet and stares at her hands. The tall, spare husband, stares into space. An unmistakable Protestantism clung to these three figures, a certain dignity. They express perfectly certain Anglo-Protestant communities in Quebec.

The National Gallery of Canada at Ottawa owns her masterpiece—to my mind, the most sensitive portrayal of woman ever made in Canada. The structure of "Standing Woman" never violates anatomical exactitude but is based on abstract geometric planning and is in complete contrast to the heavy-jowled "Linda". The latter expresses the boundless optimism and faith in the results of honest and continuous effort that Canada experienced after the First World War, but the "Standing Woman", a nude wearing a pompadour, incarnates the modern girl, uncertain of the future, both in mortal life and the hereafter.

## VI

Sylvia Daoust brings renewed life to the great traditions of liturgical art established in this country centuries ago by Mere Marie le Maire des Anges. She has been in great measure

responsible for the renaissance of ecclesiastical statuary in Canada during the past ten years.

Sylvia Daoust was born in Montreal on May 24, 1902. She studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Montreal, under Charles Maillard, and Maurice Feliz, and later under Edwin Holgate at the Montreal Art Association. She won a scholarship awarded by the Government of the Province of Quebec in 1929, and the same year the Sculpture Prize (jointly with Elizabeth Wyn Wood) in the Willingdon Fine Arts Competition. In 1942, she won the First Prize for "Our Lady of Montreal" in the Competition held on the occasion of the Third Centenary of the Founding of Montreal. The statue is now in the Chapel of the Federation Nationale de St. Jean Baptiste.

Ten years ago, the Roman Catholic churches were filled with plaster casts. Today more modern churches are constantly being erected, and the interior decoration and statuary is being entrusted to the most gifted and creative artists of to-day in French Canada, thanks to Le Retable d'Art Sacre, an organization\* that advises the curates of parishes intending to build a new church, or remodel an old one, concerning the plans and artists available. Miss Daoust was one of the original members and has set very high standards by the religious statues executed.

She is also an excellent portrait sculptor. Her work is in the Quebec Provincial Museum, and has been exhibited at the Tate Gallery in London, England, and by International Business Machines, New York

## VII

It is often contended that Canada lacks culture, but this describes our nation as it was when a young Dominion, fifty years ago. Ignorant of our rich French Canadian and Indian traditions, we aped Europe. Sculpture is the least remunerative of the arts and perhaps the most demanding on its devotees; yet these six sculptors, Frances Loring, Florence Wyle, Jacobine Jones, Elizabeth Wyn Wood, Sybil Kennedy and Sylvia Daoust, have given Canada an artistic identity among the nations, and they are only the six major women artists in their field. It is more correct to say that already forged sensitive and dreamy, our sculpture holds great promise for the future.

\*The members are Father W. Corbell, President, and Father Lecoutey, Cecile Chabot, Sylvia Daoust, Marius Plamondon, Gilles Beaugrand, Maurice Raymond and the writer (a Protestant).