

# XVI

1959 - 1960

## Opening the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts

Reproduction of the O'Keefe Centre Mural began to appear everywhere, all the newspapers (even in colour in their magazine sections), Park Plaza magazine, Canadian Tours and so on. The mural was photographed in colour, its full length, before the wall went in. Thousands of 28 inch long folders in colour of the entire mural were handed out by the management, and still are on request.

The cover shows the excellent design of the building outside, with the following:

O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto is a multi-purpose theatre designed to house the best in entertainment... musical comedy, revue, opera, jazz, ballet, symphony and drama.

The result of five years of planning and construction, the building is outstanding in design and facilities.

Dominating the main entrance foyer of the theatre is the York Wilson mural depicting "The Seven Lively Arts"—a panoramic reminder to the audience of the many art forms in which man has engaged. Over a hundred feet in length, on a curved wall, it forms a colourful and appropriate symbol for a building whose function is the presentation of classic and contemporary theatre.

Working with two assistants, graduates of the Ontario College of Art, Robert Paterson and John Labonte-Smith,

it took Mr. Wilson from September of 1959 to May 1960, to complete the mural.

The commentary is by Paul Duval, eminent art critic: The Seven Lively Arts have been immortalized by painters and sculptors for many centuries. York Wilson's mural lends them an original and contemporary dress.

Rich in both design and imagery, it knits together a complex variety of symbols with a rhythmic unity of line and colour.

The character of each art is dramatized not only by subject matter, but in the changing patterns of the mural's composition.

Architecture, for example, is appropriately dominated by a soaring vertical movement while the Dance section is woven together by an animated sweep of encircling curves.

A mural is meant to humanize a building, to identify its purpose and activities. York Wilson's painting does this ideally for the O'Keefe Centre.

It is high drama in pictorial form.

Paul Duval

In late March the actress Julie Wilson came to tour the Centre and many pictures appeared in the Press with her viewing the mural with various personages, including a tête à tête with York.

The Telegram: ... A Safari of top British and American producers as well as actors threading their way through the rough shell of the \$12,000,000 O'Keefe Centre and came out blinking in wonder... and doubt. At the end of their tour their comments ranged from "best in the world" to "a monster." The worry was its size. Broadway productions tried out here wouldn't fit the average Broadway musical designed for a stage only 32 feet wide. Hugh Walker pointed out that O'Keefe's 60 foot wide stage at the proscenium arch could be reduced to 36 feet with

masking panels and the 3,200 seat auditorium could be cut down to 1,100 seats for smaller productions with a sliding acoustical curtain. Most of the Broadway representatives, however, appeared delighted with the Centre. They marvelled over the huge 128 by 60 foot stage area, the elevator equipped orchestra pit, the bright roomy dressing rooms with private showers, the separate rehearsal hall and the modern delivery (scenery trucks driving onto the stage) and storage systems. The designers of the projected Lincoln Arts Centre for New York City said “Magnificent,” and hoped to borrow many ideas from the O’Keefe Centre.

The Globe magazine cover reproduced in colour the unfinished mural with painters on the scaffolding:

PAINTED ON THE WALL, A RECORD OF ARTISTIC TRIUMPHS

by Pearl McCarthy

Hours of thought and study, more than 50 gallons of painting medium, weeks of preliminary work on sketches, six months with two helpers in construction helmets painting on the specially treated cement wall—these are some of the ingredients that went into the 100-foot mural by York Wilson in the lobby of the O’Keefe Centre. Even with some delay—caused by disentangling the knotty old problem of the artist’s relation to union regulations—the mural was finished on the dot of time. York Wilson has never been an artist who believed temperament is an excuse for being late.

The subject, The Seven Lively Arts, has been carried out with motifs recalling ancient and contemporary exploits in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, the dance and drama. It is good because it is a mural—not merely a panoramic story nor a patchwork of motifs—but a unified work. It is realistic enough that the public can understand it and in addition to feeling the excitement that anything creative may cause, can be attracted by picking out such symbols as a quotation from Confu-

cius, a cave painting and a modern skyscraper. It may make many think for the first time of the fact that art is long and life is short.

York /w is a Toronto-born artist who spends time abroad when he can, but has the distinction of having attained success on his home ground.

When the mural was finished it was carefully covered for protection from dust or damage, while the building details were being finished. Herbert Irving, the interior decorator, came to York with a sample of the planned carpet. York was a little surprised when Herbert showed him a green carpet sample. When Herbert said many meters had already been woven on a custom job, York approved it not wishing to disturb him, after all the mural was high up, quite isolated.

The great day of the opening of the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts arrived October 1, 1960. It was just like a Hollywood Opening, bright lights, beautifully gowned women and handsome men, television and radio stopping VIP's for interviews as they entered, excitement ran high. On entering the main foyer, everyone stopped to look around, especially at the 100-foot mural by York Wilson just over the entrance doors. The colours were rich in a new mat medium, vinyl acetate, intermingling sections showing "The Seven Lively Arts," the largest mural in Canada. One section flowed into the next in this order: Painting Sculpture - Architecture - Music - Literature - The Dance and Drama. York's plan was to show the earliest form of each art, important periods in between, ending with a contemporary work. It was realistic enough for all to study the contents, though not easily seen at first glance. York hoped discovery of something not seen earlier would go

on for years, forever keeping it interesting. He also planned a mystery and schemed with his friend Ettore Mazzoleni, the Opera Conductor and Principal of the Royal Conservatory of Music, to find a bar of music not too easily recognized. Apparently they schemed too well as it has not been recognized yet, even though many have spent considerable time trying to guess it, including his dear departed friend, Maestro Ernesto Barbini, who wanted so much to be the one to discover it. He always called York "brother." Today only Joanne Mazzoleni and I know the answer. Let's hope it will be discovered while we're around. The opening performance was the new musical, *Camelot*, with Richard Burton and Julie Andrews; book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Lowe and staged by Moss Hart. The elaborate program included a page showing the almost finished mural, York in his hard hat and a group from various theatre guilds, O'Keefe Centre management and Toronto City Council members listening to proposed plans for Toronto's newest theatre. Below Gratien Gélinas, famous Montreal actor-director, with Broadway actress-singer Julie Wilson, and Dr. Boyd Neel, Dean of the Toronto Conservatory of Music inspecting the semi-finished theatre. Finally members of the carpentering crew breaking pressure of the day's work, on stage entertaining their colleagues with rock 'n roll and western music.

Another innovation at the Centre was to be continuing exhibitions of paintings, a great boon for Canadian visual arts since the audience came from far and near. The first directors of this program were Ayala Zacks, A.J. Casson, Dr. Theodore Heinrich, the art historian and director of the Royal Ontario Museum and York Wilson.

The first exhibition included 25 Ontario painters, Arbuckle - Burton - Bush - Casson - Collier - Comfort - Coughtry - Gorman - Greenstone - Haworth - Hedrick - Hodgson - Housser - Kemp - MacDonald - Nakamura - Roberts - Snow - Town - Urquhart - Vavarande - Watson - Wilson - Winter - Yarwood.

The Centre opened with a grand reception, then the performance and a celebrity party after. The social columns were filled with names. We came home about 3:30 a.m., I went directly to the kitchen picking up a cloth doll on the floor, replacing it to its knob on the milk box door, thinking nothing of it, it must have fallen. We then went upstairs and found my opened purses strewn along the hall corridor. We realized someone had been in the house. After a quick search I found a small amount of cash, a fur coat and jacket, even small fur pieces for trimming, my new Olivetti typewriter and a small suitcase were missing. We called the police who sat with us for the next two hours trying to figure out how thieves could have entered since we had found everything locked. In going over our every move many times, I finally mentioned picking up the cloth doll and replacing it to its usual place on the milk box door as we no longer used the milk box.

The police sprang to examine the milk box finally telling us this was the needed clue. They said a small child had been put through the milk box and had opened the door, after which everything had been closed. They said this was a fairly common method, however they were stumped for further clues so the case remained unsolved, but they secured the serial number of the typewrite from the Olivetti Company. Our Insurance Company replaced our loss. We thought that was the end of

that but about six months later, the police called to say they had found my typewriter in a pawn shop, it had been dropped so needed repairs. I could buy it back for \$20 if I wished, which I did and Olivetti returned it in good condition. I reported this to the Insurance Company and they said it was simpler to forget it. The moral is not to let your name appear in the social columns if avoidable.

In spite of everything it was a grand and exciting evening; Hugh and Shirley Walker, manager of the O'Keefe Centre, were fine and thoughtful hosts, which continued over the years until their retirement. Even the friendly doorman always said to York, "It's your theatre" and gave us special service. A postcard by the Canadian Postcard Company appeared shortly of the foyer and mural at the O'Keefe Centre.

Since there had been a few months before the big opening, we had gone to Mexico for the four summer months. It was a great change and gave York a chance to get back to his easel painting. We returned for the opening and after that left for Paris for a long sojourn. Ambassador Pierre Dupuy, previously in Italy, was now Ambassador to France. He had confided to us his next post would be France and had invited us to come at the same time.

After a few days at the Hotel Solferino on Rue de Lille on the left bank, we picked up our little Renault Dauphine car previously ordered from Canada. Then we started to look for a studio. The first Agent we called on said he had two studios to show us, but the first one was so perfect at 12 Boulevard Perriere that we didn't look further. There was a row of five Pavilions, all with a small garden in front and backing on to the next street, Rue Saussure, which faced north with a wall of

windows. The studio was enormous, two stories high with a balcony at one end and a toilet and washroom at the other end. The entrance hall with stairs, a clothes closet, now a coal bin, led to the studio. There was a small dining room, a kitchen with a furnace and upstairs a large bedroom, bathroom and the balcony overlooking the studio. It was sparsely furnished with the kitchen having the bare essentials, but such space and excellent lighting that little else mattered.

York quickly bought supplies, guided by his friend the painter, Luc Peire. I went to one of the big department stores to buy other necessities, such as a small washing machine and found a tiny Hoover, it fitted nicely into the upstairs bathroom. I also bought an electric blanket about a meter square, it proved sufficient. When my purchases arrived, all wrapped in heavy brown paper York began to eye the big sheets. He had always been nervous in a new studio, finding it hard to get started, so had been going to the Louvre daily making drawings of some of the early sculptures. Now with his large sheets of brown paper he started transferring his drawings in large form with india ink and black gouache also collages mounting newspaper on the brown paper making large black and brown (colour of the paper) and newspaper abstractions. He hung these from the balcony and so having some of his own work around him, he began to relax and feel at home. He told himself he would destroy them, not recognizing that he was into a new phase. They were just a trick to loosen him up and get started, and start he did with much larger canvases than usual with a freer and looser style.

About this time someone brought Jean Cassou to the studio, the Director of the Modern Museum of Art and all the

Museums of France. He immediately spotted these large banners hanging from the balcony and inquired about them. York explained it was merely a way of getting used to his new studio and would destroy them eventually. Jean Cassou exploded, "Under no circumstances must you destroy them, they are unique and have their own presence. They would make marvellous tapestries!" After this advice York began to wonder how to preserve them. He covered both the front and back with a clear plastic medium hoping to seal out the air. Later in Toronto an art restorer mounted them on good quality linen for extra strength. The AGO bought Le Figaro, 1961 in 1965 and The Lion Hunt, 1960 was invited to The Cardiff Commonwealth Arts Festival in London, England.

In Paris one seems to live 'art' all the time. The artist works in his studio all day, goes to vernissages most evenings and gathers with other artists at a sidewalk café over an aperitif and dinner and guess what he talks about, 'art.' Artists generally haven't much money so they've developed a knack of getting by on the cheap. They gather, by instinct, wherever a little food is available, hors d'oeuvres and drinks, celebrations, embassy parties, vernissages, students' restaurants or inexpensive ones. One of our favourite spots introduced by the Luc Peires was La Petite Hostellerie which served a glass of wine, small portions but good main course and a small dessert for about \$1 Canadian. Of course we frequented others where the artists gathered, St. Germain, Montparnasse (Hemingway's hangout) and others. We were fortunate in having influential friends visiting Paris who took us to some of the great name places. The wildest few days we ever had were when Blair Laing of the Laing Galleries, Toronto made one of his frequent

visits to Paris. Blair searched us out, still hopeful he could woo York back to his gallery but York did not change dealers easily even though he knew Blair would do more internationally for him and he was fond of Blair. His trips were to search for the work of early Canadian artists (like Gagnon and Maurice) who had painted in Europe.

Blair took us to the Café de la Paye for breakfast, the Tour d'Argent with its numbered ducklings for dinner, the Follies Bergère, the Théâtre du Absurde where the stage was on your lap and a foot away someone would be stabbed followed by the spurt of blood (catsup). It later closed after its long history. On our first visit to the Lido on the Champs Elysées, Blair slipped a large bill into the Maitre D's hand and we were escorted to the front, centre table. It was the most fantastic show I had ever seen and I could scarcely believe it when a whole skating rink was rolled out on stage, full of skaters. We seemed to go from one bar after another, visiting show-places in between and I remember one night in Montmartre wandering most of the night. Thank goodness Blair left after two or three days and life got back to normal.

The Swiss owners of the Hotel Solferino, M. et Mme. Sbinden had been so kind to us on arrival when we had the flu, arranging details to pick up our Renault car and giving a beautiful dinner of lobster and chicken on our departure for Boulevard Perriere that we decided they would be our first dinner guests along with the Luc Peires.

I was naive and thought to give them a Canadian dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. I didn't understand French cuts of meat and tried to explain to the butcher how to cut a rolled rib roast. I had a tiny kitchen, room for one, and a

two burner stove with small oven. I cooked everything as carefully as possible and proudly brought the roast to the round oak table in the studio. We had such sparse equipment but did our best which was certainly studio style. I placed the roast in front of York with the carving knife and fork alongside. The table was very shaky, wobbling back and forth with each thrust of the knife. York sawed away without making much of an impression; all eyes were on him and one pair of hands after another surreptitiously slipped up to hold the table steady, but the plate kept bouncing around and hands moved over to hold the platter, when suddenly the roast took off and landed on the floor. No one said a word but someone grabbed the roast and put it back on the plate, and York carried on. Somehow we got through that dinner, all were good sports.

I felt so sorry for York as he was such a good carver but that knife would have trouble cutting butter. Never again did I try to tell a French butcher how to cut a roast. My friend, Shelagh Wainman-Wood (Tom was a minister at the Canadian Embassy) gave me a large cookbook with excellent French recipes and this was visitor's fare from then on. I was conscious of so many steps in preparation and one seemed to have to wash out the pan after each step! Another trap was mixing French with English when I decided to serve "Poulet Suprême" which added raisins at the last minute, I translated raisins as grapes (forgetting I was reading it in English). The fresh, seedless, green grapes proved to be an excellent combination and when our French guests asked the name of the recipe, I replied, "Oh, it's a French recipe, Poulet Suprême, don't you know it?" "No," they had never heard of it, "but it's so good,

could we have the recipe?" I was puzzled until I realized I had read an English word as a French word; so a new recipe was born! It's worth trying, don't cook the grapes, just add at the last minute.

I began exchanging French-English lessons with Lylianne, 18 year old daughter of a Couturière on Rue de Toqueville. They were charming people and we would work mornings in our small dining room. Lylianne became interested in York's painting and offered to give him French lessons. He chose the end of the day which wouldn't disturb his work, a mistake as he was too tired to absorb much and this worried him. As always though he would learn a few catch phrases and peel them off at the right moments in over-emphasized accents which impressed some. I assured him not to worry about languages; it was more important if all his energy went into his work. This succeeded for the most part except for evenings in French. This was frustrating as he would miss nuances, often presenting his point of view in English. Some kidded that he would have all Paris speaking English.

Henri Chopin was prominent in the "Poesie Concrète" group, also an art critic. Luc Peire took us to Henri's Sunday afternoon gatherings of poets, artists, writers and interested people at Chopin's apartment. Apart from "readings" much of the poetry was taped. When people were seated the tape would begin - this was our introduction, 1960, to "Poesie Concrète." A word or two might be spoken, then silence, heavy breathing, more silence, a whistle, silence, a loud crash, etc. Often the silences would be long and people got sleepy, then a loud bang and people would jump - one woman was so startled she jumped from her dazed state to the middle of the room,

spilling the contents of her purse all over the floor. She was so embarrassed she tried to look as if she had just dropped it, sheepishly picking things up. Everyone raved about this new art form, even the Luc Peires??? so we went along with it for a while, thinking we must be missing something and should try to understand. We subscribed to Chopin's magazine, more of same, poetry with a line of meaningless words and each succeeding line would have a letter or word less or the reverse. A pocket at the back of each magazine contained a small disc which one could play of the same monotonous nonsense. After having given it a fair trial, we found we were busy Sunday afternoons. It was difficult as the Chopins were popular among our friends and we met constantly. They were intelligent and great fun; we couldn't help feeling there must be something we didn't understand!

Another experience was "Musique Concrète." We would go to the Conservatory for a concert. At the appointed hour, lights would dim, no one would come on stage, just a great silence then a loud undecipherable "BANG," we jumped, looked around, saw nothing, long silence again, another ungodly noise from another direction and so on. We soon gave that up and one night returning home by Metro (parking was difficult around the Conservatory) we decided to move our new Dauphine car from a distant spot to in front of our door, not available earlier. We looked and looked and couldn't find it, but near where we left it safely behind a street barricade for street repairs, a policeman was directing traffic around an obvious wreck, so we went further along, no Dauphine. Taking a closer look at the wreck, it was our precious Dauphine, now foreshortened against a tree, unrecognizable, with another

damaged car behind and a large Chrysler rammed into it in front. We asked the Gendarme what had happened and what to do as that was our car. He said, a woman driving the Chrysler had smashed through the barricade, pushing the Dauphine into the car behind which veered off and concertined the Dauphine against the tree. He said to go to the Police station in the morning and report the accident.

Our phone started ringing early in the morning as neighbours on their way to work had recognized our car. One caller was the Couturière, Mme. Schreiber; when she heard the story, she said her daughter, Lylianne should accompany us to the Police station. Lylianne was the beautiful 18 year old girl with whom we exchanged French-English lessons. As we entered the Police station there was a hubbub of conversation between policemen lolling around. As Lylianne came into view all conversation stopped and every eye followed her. When we entered a particular office to report the accident, she had immediate attention and all particulars were quickly noted. Fortunately we had taken out the most expensive insurance as only \$80 was allowed for the wreck and we had a new Dauphine in a few days, with the slightest deduction. Never underestimate the power of a beautiful woman on a Frenchman, or any man for that matter!

So much for our education in Poesie and Musique Concrète. It took a few years before these innovations hit America and particularly Canada. Pop Art, originating in England hit Paris during our sojourn (some very clever) took its time reaching Canada.

Marcelle Kahn was a lovely older person painting in the Constructivist direction. Marcelle Ferron, a painter from Que-

bec who had the knack of getting government grants, lived with a Doctor, Guy Tredez, who also painted. They had a house on the outskirts of Paris in Clamart. Our first visit was an eye-opener, Marcelle a student of Bourduas, as was Riopelle, had her studio in the garage and painted with the doors open for light. It wasn't easy to move around, large canvases stacked everywhere and tables deep in dried paint; she slashed away in a flamboyant fashion. She had quite a commanding presence for such a small person, electric, one scarcely notices the dirt and heavy layers of paint. It was almost impossible to use the bathroom, it seemed it had never been cleaned. On one occasion Lionel Roy, the Leonard Brooks and ourselves had been invited for lunch. After hours of talking and looking at paintings, we wondered if we were mistaken about lunch. We knew the only spot to serve it was the coffee table we sat around, piled deep, not an inch to set down a glass. Marcelle talked on and on in the manner of a Grande Dame, though her fingernails were clogged with dirt and paint. She made no move to go to the kitchen or clear the coffee table. We had forgotten the art critic Paquerette Villeneuve, had made a brief appearance and had disappeared. However Paquerette reappeared, cleared the coffee table and brought in a delicious lunch which she had been preparing all the time. Marcelle didn't miss a syllable, appearing not to notice the transition and didn't lift a finger while the rest of us scurried around. Guy Tredez was present the whole time, busy pouring drinks; a likeable, charming man, don't know when he practised medicine as he produced a number of paintings also. His paintings were more refined much like himself. Marcelle had left a husband and daughter in Quebec. Sam Zacks feeling they had talent dur-

ing a visit took a few of her paintings and Guy's back to Canada.

Many years later Marcelle arranged an exhibition with Roberts Gallery in Toronto. She did as well as could be expected for a first exhibition. The following year she doubled her prices; Roberts felt they wouldn't be able to sell them at the new prices and she left in a huff for another gallery. Later we saw a splendid reproduction of her glass decoration in a Montreal subway station. There's too little rapport now between artists in Quebec and the rest of Canada; it was much better when the Art Society exhibitions moved back and forth giving a feeling of oneness.

We used to visit with Rita Letendre and Ulysse Comptois in Paris. I liked Ulysse's work, more refined than Rita's at that time. She seemed to be doing a mess of colours with lots of black but today is known more for her triangles and the odd one has been effective on the facade of buildings. She also did an outdoor mural over an arch for the U.C.L.A. campus in California. Rita is of French Canadian Indian descent, a fact which enchanted Italians when she exhibited in Italy.

We went to see an African Ballet and as usual had the closest seats to the stage, as York liked to sketch. The movement was so fast and exciting that York later did a large painting (black and white) African Tempo which was shown in a solo drawing exhibition at Roberts Gallery in mid-October. One feels the intensity and excitement in this marvellous abstraction. Paul Duval comments in the Toronto Telegram, with a reproduction of Wilson's charcoal wash drawing of Bianca:

FROM ALMOST REALISM TO ABSTRACTION

Once in a while, an exhibition permits us to peer into an artist's creative processes. Such an occasion is York Wil-

son's current show of drawings at the Roberts Gallery. The two dozen drawings on view offer a clue to Wilson's evolution as a painter. Beginning with satiric studies which were pretty close to realism, Wilson has gradually developed a flexible style which now often moves into complete abstraction. The works in the present show touch upon both of these extremes.

There is a delicate charcoal study of adolescence entitled Nymph which is about as accomplished an academic sketch as one could wish for. In contrast is the crisp black and white brush drawing, Orpheus, where the rich contrasts almost leap from the paper.

It is no secret that Wilson has made as vigorous a study of techniques as anyone in this country. Only Charles Comfort rivals him in this respect.

Wilson was the first artist in these parts to experiment in the various new plastic media, especially Lucite 44. Now, it is no exaggeration to state that two out of three young painters work in Lucite.

Wilson's drawings show this same restless experimentation. For an analysis of form, he continues tradition studies from the nude. Two of the best pieces now at Roberts', Dreamer and Bianca, are of this type. For larger, more rhythmic essays in design, he is liable to break sharply with subject matter and create loose, almost pure pattern. Masqued Figure, Dark Construction and the sparkling African Tempo fit into this category.

It is the merger of Wilson's abilities as a disciplined draftsman and his imaginative organization of space which has established him as this country's most successful muralist.

His important murals for the Imperial Oil Building and the O'Keefe Centre are harmonious blendings of subject matter and design.

The secret of these successes can be found in the artist's drawings—not so much in any one drawing, but in the rich variety which is embraced by them as a group.

Both Nymph and Orpheus are in the Art Gallery of Ontario's collection.

In 1960 the usual exhibitions took place with the OSA/AIO circulating studies of the O'Keefe mural to High Schools, Colleges and Art Centres along with the folder of the mural, in colour, with commentary by Paul Duval and York Wilson. The RCA 80th showed Caribbean Port in Winnipeg; the RCA 81st at the AGT showed Landscape and Ontario Abstraction; the CGP at the Lord Beaverbrook Gallery, Fredericton, N.B., Red Abstraction; the CGP at the MMFA, Drawing (a black and white gouache, 81-1/2" x 40"); the MMFA's 77th Spring Exhibition, Gondola Mobile; the CNE's "Tribute to Women" showed Venus from the Zacks collection, now at Queens University and Caribbean Port from the Dr. Peter Heywood's collection; the O'Keefe Centre, Gondola Mobile and the AGT's "Contemporary Canadian Painting" exhibition, Mexicana and Sculptural Forms.

While in Paris, York was continuing with his large works on brown paper and small gouaches. His old friend Graeme Wilson (no relation), serving with the British Foreign Service and an internationally-known poet, had started making regular trips to Paris for NATO meetings. He spent all his spare time in the Wilson studio at 12 Boulevard Perriere, (out Avenue Wagram from the Etoile), completely absorbed in York's painting. He once said he could slip into York's skin and feel perfectly at home. They discussed art by the hour, first the brown paper drawings and newspaper collages, then the gouaches, which Graeme started titling along with York and me. With his poetic bent this began to change York's titles,

but they also had a barrel of fun with nonsensical titles, such as ‘Colour Blind Green Gages’ and ‘Venetian Blind.’

Graeme was a great historian. He became very involved in one of York’s latest brown paper and newspaper collages, a large oval. York was a member of the French Salon “L’Oeil de Boeuf” where all works in their exhibitions were either round or oval. While coming over on the plane for his next NATO meeting Graeme wrote a poem especially for this oval titled A Propos de Shaka, related to the fierce Zulu tribe in Africa.

### SHAKA ZULU

stones	Here in a shieldshape. Ishilangu, Of mirror-grass and marker
bones.	The sorcerers of Shaka Zulu Cursed and cast their lucking-
Dingiswayo,	Here are the days with The IziCwe, their Queasy eyes; And here the swaying vulture-
shadow	Over the shields and assegais; Scarred cattle-hide; M’zilikazi Hidden cattle; muscle-gloss; And sorghum stains like black-
ened daisies	Starred on the orgy-hard kaross; And here, the blood already
gnarling	Sunblack in the ochre light,

snarling  
Are Dingaan's dirk and Shaka  
Boneshapes in the kraals of night.  
Graeme Wilson, 1960

Notes:

Ishilangu - Kind of shield used by the Zulus

Dingiswayo - First head of the Zulus

IziCwe - Crack regiment of the Zulu army

M'zilikazi - General serving under Shaka, com-

mitted

great offense of hiding cattle taken in war.

sorghum - native beer

kaross - like opium bed or thing to sit on, covered

ered

in leopard skin

Shaka, finally stabbed by Dingaan, a half-brother

Kraal - enclosure, settlement

The N.G. published a book, "Paintings and Sculptures," Vol. III by R.H. Hubbard in 1960 and reproduced York's Una Familia '52 and Santa Cruz de Tenerife '52. The AGT acquired Venetian Vista '58 with a gift from the McLean Foundation.

We exchanged residences with the recently appointed French Consul, M. Scalabre in Toronto, hoping to use his Paris apartment. It had turned out to be very dark and completely unsuitable as a studio, so we discussed it with M. Scalabre's father-in-law in Paris, who was also in France's Foreign Service. We offered to be responsible until we found suitable tenants, to be approved by him. He was most affable, unlike his son-in-law in Toronto. M. Scalabre responded we would have to pay for the apartment for the next two years whether we used it or not. We returned the key to the father-in-law and

showed him the letter. He said that he had never liked his son-in-law and apologized. M. Scalabre's cheques came monthly, deducting our share for the apartment.

Among our friends was an English painter, Derek Middleton who couldn't stand England. He lived with Verity Russell (daughter of an English diplomat) who was waiting for her divorce and worked for O.E.C.D., an educational organization. Derek was a good painter but never had any money though his Dealer was the prestigious Redfern Gallery in London. Before Paris he had lived on a houseboat on the Thames, next door to the boat where they filmed "The Horse's Mouth" by James Joyce. Alec Guinness played the lead and the artist, Gully Jimson, was played by the English painter, Bratby. It is a hilarious comedy. Derek was very much like Gully Jimson - he would phone his Dealer, disguising his voice (sometimes putting a handkerchief over the phone) and rave about the work of Derek Middleton in the hope of sparking a few sales - he tried every imaginable trick. Occasionally he heard someone had bought one of his paintings and when he didn't receive a cheque, he would buy a new suit, look as prosperous as possible and call on his Dealer looking for money. He would be told, obviously he didn't need money and anyway the balance went for framing. Later he would try the opposite, dress in rags but then he couldn't get past the secretary; if he did he would be told a similar story. He ran after and begged people to buy his work in Paris, he said.

He had a great sense of humour, a large flabby figure but was graceful, once a ballet dancer and he would do a few mincing steps. One act was to play an imaginary piano, turning the pages of imaginary music, adjusting his chair, all with noth-

ing in front of him, just pantomiming - whatever act left us doubled up laughing.

Derek and Verity had a small 2-room apartment on the Rue Patay - studio doubled as living room with a counter separating a narrow space as kitchen, big enough for one person. The bathroom by the front door had scarcely room to turn around. The second room was the bedroom, again small and where Derek hung special paintings for Verity. They constantly fought and sometimes Verity would awaken with all the paintings gone. Derek in a temper had removed them while she slept and he ended up sleeping on the floor in the studio/living room. When confronted he would explain the paintings were much too good for her. Verity, being his main support, had to rise early to get to the office. Derek got up when the spirit moved him and could be found having a late breakfast of chocolate. They entertained often. Verity was a good cook and spent the first half of the evening behind the counter after the guests arrived, but with the open kitchen she was part of the conversation. Dinner though late was always worth waiting for; lucky to have it by 11 p.m. More were invited than there was room but we would squeeze around a round table with rickety chairs that would sometimes give way or sit on anything we could pile up. There were several cats and to make room for them, they had shelves on the wall. When least expected a cat would go flashing by from one shelf to another, having first made the kitchen counter. If you were in deep concentration, it would take a moment to figure out what had happened. Artists usually brought a bottle of wine, the quality depended on the artist's financial state at the moment and during 1959-64 nothing was selling in Paris. York took a bet-

ter-than-average bottle, we tried at least to taste it but the painter Ania Staritsky soon spotted this and tried to sit next to York. Derek having no money had to wait for the arrivals. It was a great day when the Middletons met Lionel Roy who always brought a bottle of scotch and was permanently on the guest list. Sometimes Derek would announce that the party couldn't start because Lionel was late. Another bit of horse-play - Derek always got paint on everything and a lot of time was spent with a bottle of turpentine removing paint from guests' clothing as they left.

Came the day when Verity's divorce was final, they decided to get married and went around holding hands, no more fighting. They went to England for the great event. They bought new clothes and left talking about having to drive on the wrong side of the road in England, warning all not to forget to change on returning to France. We all awaited the happily married couple's return and in about three weeks, back they came in a battered car, looking as irritated as ever. Something had gone wrong and they didn't get married so they were back to the usual bickering. On returning to France they drove off the boat and went sailing down the wrong side of the road right into another car.

York had returned to the oil medium during our French sojourn and 100 point or larger canvases (French term for size) were now appearing. He seemed so relaxed, his style had loosened considerably and many large canvases were now stacked in his storage area.

Lionel Roy, old friend and formerly Canadian Ambassador to Mexico, had now been posted as Canada's first Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris. We had met again after arrival

when he invited us for New Year's dinner to his apartment on Avenue Monceau. We gradually moved into the habit of frequent dinners at each other's place; he was a bachelor and a good cook, though he had a cook. He would often go into my small kitchen and lift the lids to see what was cooking for dinner. The thing that impressed him most in the cooking direction was my fluffy French omelette. It called for whipping the whites of eggs until stiff, adding the yolks with a couple of tablespoons of milk, usually topping with parmesan cheese and cooked slowly in a buttered frying pan. He couldn't get over how it rose and was beautifully browned. He questioned the milk, saying, one usually added milk to stretch things out a bit; but it does make a difference, lighter consistency. Being French from Quebec, although educated in France, this may not have been part of his repertoire.

Lionel never tired of talking about York's paintings and if there were other visitors, often took it upon himself to explain the abstractions and with his vivid imagination it was usually hilarious. It was never dull with Lionel and York on hand. York formed the habit of going to small towns to sketch on weekends. Lionel drove with the larger car and a diplomatic license which came in handy at times. We would leave York at his desired spot to sketch and go off exploring, mostly churches, studying the friezes, ancient sculpture and paintings, small art galleries or if we were near a spot famous for something like cheese such as Lesieux, we would visit the factory, returning at the appointed hour for York. In 1961 when the Leonard Brooks visited us from Mexico, they joined us: it was a cold, windy day and we left York and Leonard on a bridge to sketch, saying we would be back in an hour. Lionel, Reva

and I sped away but got involved with churches (which often happened with Reva) we didn't return for two hours. We found them sitting on their sketching stools, finished long since, cold and mad as hops. Reva hopped out and took pictures of the two forlorn-looking artists.

Maestro Ernesto Barbini, came to Paris to conduct the Paris Television Orchestra. We had a reception for them after the concert at our Boulevard Perriere studio. Among the guests were the Canadian Ambassador, Pierre Dupuy and his Ministers, Lionel Roy who brought the new, just arrived Cultural Attache with him, René Garneau and our landlord M. Queille as Mme. Queille was a violinist in the Television Orchestra. There were other Canadians and artist friends.

It was a successful affair and M. Dupuy congratulated us, saying that as we entertained more Canadians than the Embassy, we should have some recompense. Since René Garneau had just come from Switzerland without checking with the Embassy as to his new posting, M. Dupuy said that he had to come here to meet his new Ministers. He invited the Barbinis for lunch the following day. It was true so many Canadians came to our studio home, over 100 from the Arts & Letters Club of Toronto alone, as well as artists and friends. One of these was the new Director of the Art Gallery of Toronto, William Withrow and his wife June.

It seemed Bill Withrow needed to talk with someone as he was under intense strain at the Gallery. Apparently the retiring Director, Martin Baldwin, was loathe to relinquish the reins of his longtime seat of power. He would come into the Gallery daily and create a scene with Bill in the privacy of his office, sometimes to the point of tears, said Bill. During open-

ings Martin was accustomed to gathering with his small group over coffee in the Sculpture Court and continued to do so always excluding the Withrows. In the past we had often been invited to join Martin's group. The Withrows were a young, attractive couple, Bill having been the Principal of North York Collegiate. It must have been very difficult for him in this larger, social world. It's too bad humans can be so inconsiderate; however it helped Bill to unburden himself. We made a mental note to try and correct the situation on our return. However instead of staying two years in Paris, as we had planned, it turned out to be four.

Early in our sojourn Russel Harper from the National Gallery turned up to see what was going on in our Paris studio. He was so impressed with what he saw, he sent three large canvases back to Ottawa, a great encouragement for York. When an artist is hot, strong support at home can make him a world figure. York Wilson never received a government grant. We did everything on his earnings from art and we had learned how to accomplish unbelievable dreams on the cheap. Fortunately other people and other countries recognized talent, which made so many things possible. Thus it was a shock to receive a letter from Jack Wildridge of the Roberts Gallery, saying the National Gallery had sent three large canvases to his gallery without any explanation. What should he do with them? It must have been a shock to the enthusiastic Russell Harper also to have his judgement questioned like this. He never mentioned York Wilson again in his later books, nor did Robert Hubbard, the curator, except to list Wilson's work in the collection index.

The new Cultural Attaché at the Canadian Embassy, René

Garneau brought Jean Cassou again to the studio and Jean was delighted with what he saw and invited York to a luncheon with all the Mayors of Paris. Each Paris arrondissement has a mayor and there are many. This was just before Christmas, 1960 and the luncheon would be in January, 1961. René mentioned York should have a book of samples to present to the City Fathers. All examples were back in Toronto and as York was deeply into his work, it was decided that I should return to get the necessary items. I would be gone for two weeks over Christmas and took the first plane out. My neighbour Kay Graham had written to say she didn't think anyone was in our house, so I didn't know what to expect. I found she was right, no one was in the house and considerable damage had been done.

I robbed our files for examples of York's work, knowing it's an irrevocable mistake to let an only copy be removed. However when York had the book of examples ready for presentation, he mentioned this anxiety to René, who assured him there was no worry, he personally would be responsible that everything would be returned.

I told M. Dupuy about the damage to our Toronto house. He asked that I note it all in a letter, the only recourse was when some of our chaps did unreasonable damage in France, this would sort of even up.

The date for the luncheon was set in January. Jean Cassou offered York a retrospective exhibition at the gallery of his choice, mentioning the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the Petit Palais, the Musée Galliera or whatever. France would pay for every-thing, the sole request that our National Gallery collect works of earlier periods to add to his Paris produc-

tion. York and René were in seventh heaven, York was the first English-speaking Canadian to whom France had made such an offer. After Pellán had worked in France for nine years, he was given an exhibition of his work at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. Wilson's exhibition would take place late 1963-64, allowing lots of time for the N.G. to collect earlier works. René Garneau was in charge of contacting the N.G.

York was pleased and worked happily away in his huge studio, it must have been 30 by 60 feet with north light. We had dinners back and forth with the René Garneaus. Pierre Dupuy invited us to many receptions and dinners given by the Embassy which included, NATO, UNESCO, OECD and other bodies, often finding Lionel Roy and Graeme Wilson among the guests. Jules Leger was Ambassador to NATO and our first meeting was at a dinner given by Lionel Roy. I remember Gaby's (Gabriel) first remark after the introduction, "Well, would you like a lesson in French or, enjoy the evening?" That endeared them to us and we became great friends. George Ignatieff and Allison were there at the time. They held a luncheon for visiting Donald Cameron (N.G. and editor of Canadian Art) who was hard of hearing and when Cameron was passed a large platter of individually sectioned whole fish, he slid the whole fish onto his plate, not realizing there were portions for others. Allison excused herself and took the platter to the kitchen, hastily looking for something else. Conversation was at its peak and Cameron was totally unaware of his faux pas.

Robert Eli, the Director of Quebec House often invited us to special occasions, an aid in getting to know our Quebec colleagues like Marcelle Ferron, Ulysse Comptois and Rita

Latendre, the Leon Bellefleurs, Edmund Alleyn, Riopelle and others.

I took my white fur coat to Paris and made the mistake of wearing it to an opening at the Musée d'Art Moderne, being used to dress for openings in Toronto. First I had asked Jenny Peire whether it was black or white tie, she said, "What do you mean?" I said, "How should York dress for the opening?" Jenny said, "Like an artist," which didn't give me much of a clue. It turned out to be the 'sloppy Joe' sweater crowd and they eyed my white fur coat as much as the works of art.

In 1960 it was our introduction to many strange things which hadn't yet hit America. There were many pieces of living sculpture - white mice running around in contraptions - birds in cages - a monkey and the real "Elsie" the cow - there were boxes stuffed with garbage - surrealistic settings with dolls - Robert Massa prancing with a metre-long brush 'air painting,' stopping now and then making strokes in the air, his name across his back. I wondered how he made his living? This was our introduction to Tingeley, the Swiss sculptor; you heard his work tingling away before seeing it, a motorized contraption making inane movements and sounds, with inane things (tin cans, nuts and bolts, pieces of fur which flapped, rattling and blowing whistles ad infinitum) but very amusing. Later he made sculpture that wrote poetry, painted pictures and finally destroyed itself. This exhibition was also our introduction to Caesar who crushed cars, touched up the mess with daubs of paint and hung it on the wall. Prior to this, his rather figurative sculpture, often animals, was well-known. Later we met his father-in-law (a dealer in art materials) who said Caesar was having a bad time, hadn't worked for some

time, a nervous breakdown. Besides being in demand for crushing cars, people began sending him new Cadillacs to crush and other sculptors began to copy his ideas. He ended up confused, his Dealer wouldn't allow him to crush another car - then he found he could get TV rejects cheaply from the factory and began pushing their integral parts around. Of course he became an exhibitionist and during a television interview, he was lying on a bed with a delicate, beautiful silk bedspread with a huge pair of worker's dirty hob-nail boots. This kind of outrageous behaviour does harm to art and artists.

Meanwhile the art world back in Canada was struggling along as usual on a pittance, trying its best to show Canadian art across Canada but running into more and more opposition from the art galleries. The government was cutting its small grants for operating costs to art societies. All the work was done by the artists, circulating the exhibitions, producing catalogues and lending their work without charge. One wonders what art galleries are for if not to support the art of the country! With the annual struggle and perseverance of the artists, exhibitions were still squeaking through. Roberts Gallery did a good job keeping York Wilson represented. In 1961 Mexicana was shown at the AGT with the OSA - AIO/OSA circulated O'Keefe Mural studies and special sections - RCA showed Landscape (now Blue Abstraction) and Ontario Abstraction at the N.G. - CGP/Regina Drawing - N.G. 4th Biennial, Shades of Tlalpujua, Mexicana and Cathedral - Winnipeg Show Boats and Venice and the O'Keefe Centre, Bechtel, Only, Reppen, Wilson (by invitation), Wilson sent Guanajuato, New Growth, Night Abstraction, Winter Beginning, Indian Dance and Patscuaro. There were a few Press comments:

Paul Duval said, "It is appropriate that York Wilson should have a place in this first show..." -

Kamienski, critic Winnipeg, "From all the works in this exhibition, I would give preference to the work of York Wilson. It stands out in the crowd by virtue of its maturity and utmost economy of means..." -

Canadian Art reproduced Portofino.- the AGT purchased two drawings.

The University of British Columbia invited **Eight Ontario Painters** to exhibit - Burton-Coughtry-Nakamura-Ronald-Snow-Town-Urquhart-Wilson and toured the exhibition, 1961-'62 to Brandon Allied Arts - University of Alberta - Edmonton Art Gallery - Calgary Allied Arts - Saskatoon Art Centre - Vernon Art Association - Calgary Institute of Technology and Art. York sent, Night Abstraction - Indian Dance - A Tarascan Place - Landscape.

Back in Paris reviews began to reach Canadian publications such as Paquerette Villeneuve of the Ottawa Journal, who commented in her interview:

York Wilson said: "I've always been warmly received in Canada as an artist," he explains. "I even have a house there. But I can't live permanently in Toronto because life would be too easy. I have too many friends and I'm afraid it would decrease my output."

Goodman of the Globe and Mail - Betty Kennedy taped an interview - Nora Harper for the Toronto Star and Helen Palmer came to Paris from the Toronto Star to finish an interview she had begun in Toronto, comparing Toronto and Paris studios and homes which appeared on February 18, 1961 taking a full page of copy and pictures.

Leonard and Reva Brooks arriving in Paris some months earlier had found a hotel close by, in fact just across the street from 12 Boulevard Perriere and were in York's studio far too

often. We decided to go on a sketching trip with them, through France, Switzerland and Italy, not a bad idea as it gave York a change. We took both cars, driving in tandem.

We had agreed to meet the German Painter, Francis Bott and his wife Mania for the opening of his exhibition at the Susan Feigel Gallery in Basle, Switzerland a month later. We drove through Switzerland to Milan and on to Verona and Venice, stopping frequently whenever York and Leonard wanted to sketch and Reva to take photographs.

Venice as usual was an island of peace, no traffic, but it was flood time and San Marco was under water using shallow boats and planks to get around. We stayed at Count Seguso's Pension on Santa Maria della Salute, the Guidecca side, not far from Peggy Guggenheim's place. The first floor was under a foot or two of water and all action was on the upper floors, entering on a plank set firmly on the third step. Count Seguso was a charming gentleman and inquired as to what kind of food we liked. Reva, ever anxious to practice her Italian asked me how to say, "I like fish." I replied, "Mi piace molto il pesce," which she repeated and the Count said, "Fine, you will have fish for lunch." Reva, enjoying the exchange asked, "How do I say I like it very much?" Again I replied, "Mi piace moltissimo il pesce," which she said with great emphasis. The Count laughed saying, "Very well you will have fish every meal." And we did with all the variety the Count could muster which delighted all of us, except York who was not quite so fond of fish.

On the way to Rome we stopped at many places such as Arezzo where there were the famous Piero della Francesca murals in the San Francesco church. There was no one about

when we entered. Scaffolding was in place for the murals to be cleaned and the restorers had gone to lunch. York lamented, "I sure would like to see those murals up close," and Leonard replied, "Why don't you?" York was up in a shot examining them closely when all hell broke loose. Priests came running from all directions, shouting in Italian. We tried to explain but they wouldn't listen, they just wanted us to leave.

It was delightful renewing our acquaintance with all the points of interest on the way to Rome. We had lived in Rome in 1958 and now it was such a pleasure to see it all again and introduce Leonard and Reva to some of our favourite haunts. Then on to Florence with the Uffizi, its Leonardo drawings carefully covered, exposed only for moments, the Ponte Vecchio over the Arno river, Michelangelo's David, Donatello's horse and many other wonders. Time was running short for Francis Botts' exhibition in Basle so we headed for Bologna, parting with the Brooks, arranging to meet them in Basle or Paris.

We went in search of friends, the Count and Countess de Regi. Elizabeth de Regi had inherited her family's castle which had been vacant during the war and hadn't had a roof for many a year. Francisco de Regi was serving in Italy's foreign service. A few years ago they had started restoring the castle during their holidays and were now in residence. The roof was on, restoration was going along each summer and Elizabeth's aunt was living there permanently. We were interested in some of the murals, the faces were Elizabeth's ancestors. The big unsolved mystery involved two murals on facing walls in the same room. York pointed out one was Christian, the other profane but no explanation was forthcoming!

On the evening of our arrival there was to be a great Feast at the castle for the villagers who by custom all worked for the Lords of the castle. We couldn't stay but we did visit nearby relatives in other castles who had returned after the "hunt" and we saw larders well stocked with various kinds of game.

We now headed for Turin and the Simplon Pass. We were surprised how easily we were just waved across the border. We went into a restaurant for lunch and enquired as to how long it would take us to get to Basle. The weather could be bad ahead though we were in hot summer weather at present and there was no way we could make Basle in two days. Our kind hosts told us to take the train, put our car on it and travel directly through tunnels in the mountains. We hurried to the station and did just that. Our seat was in the last car of the train, except for the flatcar which we could see through the back window carrying our Renault with all our belongings locked inside. We went along nicely for some time, going through tunnels while climbing gradually. We were alone in the car and in our thin summer clothes we became colder and colder on the metal seats and huddled together. We looked longingly at our car thinking of the warm sweaters in it. We hadn't seen a soul since boarding, we were helpless, when suddenly the door burst open. A conductor came directly to us talking a mile a minute in German but we couldn't understand a word. He kept repeating himself getting more and more excited, finally leaving in disgust.

In short order the train came to a stop and we could see we were on a very high trestle bridge over a ravine. We heard what sounded like an uncoupling noise and sure enough the train pulled away leaving us and the flatcar with our car all

alone. We couldn't step out, there was nothing but rails over a great ravine and we couldn't reach our car to get warmer clothes. We must have sat for nearly an hour, feeling cold and frightened, when we heard a train approaching slowly, which recoupled and our two cars began to move again. We realized we had been dropped to be picked up by another train going to Basle. We went on and on into the middle of the night, not having eaten since an early lunch. Suddenly the train stopped for this was the end of the line. All was black outside and raining, no sign of a station in the darkness and we drove our car off the flatcar onto the nearby road which we followed when suddenly we saw a figure running which we hailed. We made contact, I don't remember in what language but as we talked our eyes began to distinguish shapes in the darkness, presumably a station with a small light.

Our informant told us just to keep going straight down the road and we would come to an Inn. After some distance we reached it, a light through the night, all were in bed, the restaurant closed. They had a room and after much pleading they found us a bite to eat and then to bed. Finally getting warm under a great comforter we fell into a deep sleep. Wakening early we couldn't believe our eyes, our car was deep in snow. We had a quick breakfast and the owner helped clear the snow from our car and sent us on our way. The snow blizzard was heavy, difficult to see a yard ahead which bothered York, so I took over the driving. Fortunately the wind was strong enough to keep the snow from piling up on the road. The going was slow along the excessively winding mountain road but we finally pulled into Basle in front of the hotel about 5 p.m. York had told me along the way that he had a

dream the previous night. We were in the Bott's house and Mania was ill in bed upstairs. She asked York if he would tell Francis to come up as she had something important to tell him.

York suggested I go in and make enquiries while he waited in the car. Strangely, most of the staff of the hotel were standing together in the hallway expecting us looking very concerned as I opened the door. I gave my name. They said, "Yes we know, but Mania died last night, a quick flu, and Francis cancelled his exhibition and has taken the body back to Paris."

Thunderstruck I returned to the car to tell York and he said, "Yes I know, she died in my dream but I didn't want to tell you." He was always very psychic, it was revealed to him at the time she had passed on. We decided to head for Paris without delay. It turned out Mania Bott had not died from the flu; she had been on cortisone for a long time for her crippling arthritis and cortisone poisoning was the cause.

The weather was better now at a lower altitude. We drove for a while before stopping for the night, starting out early the next morning in order to reach Paris before evening. Stopping for lunch en route, we found Leonard and Reva in the same restaurant, such a coincidence as we had separated back in Bologna and had taken different routes getting from there to here.

During the several months the Brooks visited Paris, it was interesting how he studied York's painting, sometimes turning his back unconsciously to us during get togethers while looking at paintings. We understood as he was suffering from a long depression when people generally had become more interested in abstraction than in figurative work. However Leonard had no feeling for abstraction. During the Paris trip,

he began gathering all sorts of materials to make collages with splashes of bright paint. This progressed nicely and he did many good things. Later when we were back in Canada, we were amused the odd time mistaking Leonard's work for York's. York never minded, he was pleased if it helped Leonard out of his depression. Leonard eventually worked through York's influence and developed his own fine abstractions.

Sam Zacks kept us informed about the art scene in Canada with regular letters. Not only were they full of news but his handwriting was interesting, very small, covering every space on the sheet, afterthoughts running in several lines up the margin. In one letter he said, "Whatever did you do to Harold Town, he spends all his time denouncing you?" Of course Sam knew and we knew that York had done nothing but support Harold Town - had arranged his first exhibition with the Laing Galleries - had supported his mural at Cornwall - tried to transfer a mural to Harold when York was unable to accept the commission. Jealousy is such a terrible thing, it can obscure our thinking, making us react unfairly towards our fellow men. There had been other evidences of jealousy. One evening on entering the Art Gallery of Toronto, Gerald Gladstone, the sculptor, came running towards York saying: "I didn't mean it, it's just that someone had to bring you down." York had no idea what he was talking about but learned later that Gerald had said something against him on the air. Gerald liked York and hastened to square it with him immediately.

Someone sent us a press clipping quoting Harold Town: "He didn't have to leave Canada to find things to paint. There was enough in his own back yard to keep him busy for the rest of his life! "

There was little doubt as to whom he was referring.

1962 was an exciting year, one of York's new canvases, Reflexion being invited to the exhibition, "L'Art au Canada," at the Galerie des Beaux Arts in Bordeaux, France. His supporters were Sam Zacks and Dr. Theodore Heinrich in Toronto. Unbeknownst to us other factions were working against York; much later we discovered an item in Canadian Art by David Silcox (a friend of Harold Town's) which said in essence related to the Bordeaux exhibition, "Why Wilson of all people?"

Being in a new country, virtually unknown, it's interesting how quickly the main connoisseurs of art in France became conscious of York's work. Michel Seuphor, the world renowned guru on abstract art was about to go to press with his new book, "La Peinture Abstraite" when he saw York's work and promptly included Abstract Group, 1961. We have the talent in Canada but sadly we need a Minister of Culture. Thus it was that York was the only Canadian artist honoured in a book published in five languages.

While we were sitting at a sidewalk café with York sketching the facade of Notre Dame Cathedral, suddenly a familiar voice cried "York!" It was Michael Foyteni who had come to Paris to finish a film that he had begun earlier in Canada for the CBC, "Profile of York Wilson." He set to work immediately in the Paris studio, bringing the film up-to-date with the new Paris paintings. We heard it was 'aired' the first time on February 26, 1963 and a few times later but unfortunately we were away. Some Galleries and the Arts & Letters Club tried to borrow it or a video without success; the CBC said they couldn't find it. The first time we were able to see it was in

1983 when the energetic owner, Susan Macdougall, of the Montreal Gallery, **La Collection Tudor**, contacted her cousin at the CBC and he persevered until he found it stored in a building at the Toronto Airport but it had lost its narrator. He had some videos made giving one to me and he was embarrassed having to charge me for it. The AGO acquired one also and we saw it for the first time in their small viewing room. It was unfortunately a little confusing without the narrator; we viewed many paintings and York answering questions, not knowing what the questions were!

In September we flew to Vienna, the Opera House was closed but we were invited to tour it and imagine a great Opera on stage. Almost next door was the Art Gallery with so many wonderful Hieronymus Bosch paintings. Next we flew to Istanbul, Turkey, settling in a hotel with a view of the Bosphorus. York did many paintings from an upper verandah. When this area was exhausted we moved to another hotel repeating the process, then a boat trip down the Bosphorus to the Black Sea which was mined on two swinging arms at the entrance. We managed to get around by group taxis holding up a card with a written destination, also holding up the number of fingers indicating passengers. If the taxi was going there and had the space, it stopped. We crossed into Asia Minor for lunch one day. We saw the great mosques, Sultan's Palace, Merderka Bridge, the Bazaar. Another day we took the boat in the opposite direction to the Princess Islands, where York sketched all day.

Our next stop was Athens where we saw a play at the ancient open air theatre adjacent to the Parthenon. We noticed the ship "Semiramus" was about to sail to various is-

lands and decided to take the week's trip. On board each night after dinner we had a lecture about the islands we would visit the following day; the well-trained guides knew their history. Often a few words were included about Greece's loss of the Elgin Marbles, that England should return them. I don't suppose there would be any Elgin Marbles if Lord Elgin hadn't rescued them. Under Turkish rule at one time gun powder was stored in the Parthenon and the golden statue of the Goddess Athena has never been found; it is thought it may have been melted down. There are also missing 'marbles' in the Louvre and in Germany!

We toured Crete, learning about the mythical King Minos and the Minoan civilization with its legends about labyrinths, minotaurs, young virgins, etc.; the rich dark reds of Rhodes; Delos with its formidable rows of sculptured lions, well preserved because of its perfect climate which inspired the poem by Byron, "The Isles of Greece."

The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece!  
 Where burning Sapho loved and sung,  
 Where grows the arts of war and peace,  
 Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!  
 Eternal summer guilds them yet,  
 But all, except their sun is set

Patmos where all the buildings are pristine white, even the steps of the great monastery, a fact common to a lesser degree on other islands and shown in York's paintings. We spent a little time on Mykonos, more touristy but York did a little sketching inland. We had 'Ouzo' (Greek drink) on the dock while watching the pelicans. We ended by spending a week

of painting on the delightful island of Ydra.

Returning to Athens we decided to take the Archaeological Tour, the Peloponesos, of Corinth, Sparta, Olympia, Delphi and so on; a most interesting tour. York returned to Paris with many drawings and sketches to generate new thought.

In January, 1964 the President of France, M. et Mme. de Gaulle invited us to a reception in honour of our Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson. We were received by the de Gaulles, Madame a friendly, cheerful lady but the President gave the impression that he would rather be fishing! Lester was amused by a story told to me by my mother. When Lester's father, the Reverent Pearson was the minister of our United Church at Aurora, Ontario, the little toddler, Lester always busied himself during the service dusting the pews.

Champagne was being offered and York made the mistake of asking for a scotch and soda, the waiter said, "C-o-m-m-e-n-t?" York quickly corrected himself saying, "cognac et siphon," "Oui Monsieur." Stanley Burke of the Canadian Press spied York's tall drink and said, "Where did you get that?" Shortly after we noticed members of the Press pouring their champagne in the nearest plant, returning to the bar asking for a "cognac et siphon."

In 1963 York had a few works in exhibitions in Canada: RCA-AGT; St. Johns, Nfld; Kingston which showed Bragozzi - OSA-AGT & London, Queen of the Adriatic (Former Baxter Award Winners), CGP-MMFA & Calgary, Night Image - London, **Master Canadian Painters & Sculptors**, sent Night Abstraction, toured to Sarnia in 1964. - Paris, L'Oeil de Boeuf at Galerie '7', VII Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil (School of Paris) sent A Propos de Shaka. La Galerie, Jacques Casanova, Paris:

La Galerie Orient-Occident, 11-man exhibition, Bozzolini-Chauvignier-Dumitresco-Istrati-Laks-Leppien-Maria Papa-Seund ja Rhee-Staritsky-J.P. Zingg-York Wilson. **Art Voices from Around the World**, U.S. "York Wilson" by Raul Furtado reproducing the Imperial Oil mural with informative text on latest two murals.

The French author and poet, Claude Aveline, Paris wrote a charming poem: 1956.

L'Oiseau-Qui-N'Existe-Pas

Voici le portrait de l'Oiseau-Qui-N'Existe-Pas.  
Ce n'est pas sa faute si le bon Dieu qui a tout fait  
a oublié de le faire.  
Il ressemble à beaucoup d'oiseaux parce que les  
bêtes qui  
n'existent pas ressemblent à celles qui existent.  
Mais celles qui n'existent pas n'ont pas de nom.  
Et voilà pourquoi cet oiseau s'appelle l'Oiseau-  
Qui-  
N'Existe-Pas,  
et pourquoi il est si triste.  
Il dort peut-être, ou il attend qu'on lui permette  
d'exister.  
Il voudrait savoir s'il peut ouvrir le bec, s'il a des  
ailes, s'il est capable de plonger dans l'eau sans  
perdre ses couleurs, comme un vrai oiseau.  
Il voudrait s'entendre changer.  
Il voudrait avoir peur de mourir un jour.  
Il voudrait fair des petits oiseaux très laids, très  
vivants.  
Le rêve d'un oiseau-qui-n'existe-pas, c'est de ne  
plus  
être un rêve.  
Personne n'est jamais content.  
Et comment voulez-vous que le monde puisse  
aller bien

dans ces conditions?

### The Bird Who Doesn't Exist

Here is the portrait of The-Bird-Who-Doesn't-  
Exist.

It is not his fault if the good Lord, who makes  
all,

has forgotten to make him.  
He resembles many other birds, because those  
who do not

exist, look like those who do.  
But those who do not exist have no name.  
So this is why this bird calls himself  
The-Bird-Who-Doesn't-Exist,  
and why he is so sad.  
Perhaps he is asleep or waiting to be allowed to  
exist.

He would like to know if he can open his beak, if  
he has,

wings,  
able to plunge in the water without losing his  
colours,

like a real bird.  
He would like to hear himself sing.  
He would like to be afraid to die one day.  
He would like to make little birds, ugly but lively.  
The dream of a bird-who-doesn't-exist, is no  
longer a dream.

No one is ever content.  
And how can you expect the world to thrive un-  
der these  
conditions?

108 distinguished artists (painters and sculptors) from all  
over the world (two from Canada, Etrog and York Wilson)

were invited to create their portraits of The-Bird-Who-Doesn't-Exist. The poet, Claude Aveline presented the entire collection to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris and the exhibition opened there October 29-December 8, 1963, later touring to other centres. Artists like Chagall, Cocteau and Tamaya are included; a film by the painter, Lapoujade was made and won the Emile Cohl prize; A limited edition (195) was published by le Club du Poème à Genève with 18 lithographs in colour by the sculptor Zadkine. Another edition (60) by Edizioni del Cavalino à Venise was made by the Canadian sculptor, Etrog. It was presented on French television by Marianne Oswald, 1968, from a script written by the author. The collection of le Musée National d'Art Moderne has been transferred to le Musée Georges Pompidou, with another showing at the new Centre in April, 1978... included works by such famous names as Chagall, Tamayo, Foujita, André Masson, Saint Saens, Severini and Zadkine...

#### Excerpts Canada:

Canadian Art, May/June: "What is business buying?"  
Reproduced Imperial Oil mural;

Marketing: "...Main Lobby O'Keefe features 100 foot mural..."  
Reproduced mural;

Postcard, O'Keefe Centre showing foyer with mural in colour, "The Seven Lively Arts;

Canadian Art, Autumn, "Another new Art Film available... both English and French";  
Reproduced Imperial Oil mural.

Agnes Etherington Centre, Queen's University, "Accessions: ...Bequest Sam and Ayala Zacks: African Totem `62; Venus `59; Reflexion `62..."  
Toured Wayne State University.

Gossip, Zena Cherry: "...Excerpts note Mrs. York Wilson, wife of Canada's few famous artists. Paris where they're spending couple of years. Michel Seuphor, art critic, author (Dictionary Modern Art, etc.) is including drawing of York's in next book. The Leonard Brooks who have been here many months are now in London and sail Mexico soon. Saw the Leon Bellefleurs (Quebec painter living here) last evening, dinner at home Lionel Roy, Canadian Ambassador UNESCO. York is planning an exhibition here, has studio full of work, has unconsciously gone more and more abstract. I am going to Sorbonne daily, continuing my studies. — Lela.

Star, Lotta Dempsey: An air of mounting excitement hovers over the Roberts Gallery, as hours tick away for the opening of York Wilson's new show... Mr. Wilson considered by many in the art world to be Canada's most important contemporary painter... will be represented by a collection of thirty gouaches... In response to queries, Lela Wilson, attractive and clever wife of the painter, wrote from Paris. Although a personal letter from an old friend, I take the privilege of sharing parts with you.

"We are making the trip because we feel these gouaches are an important step in York's work... Some say, re the color, they could only have been painted in Paris. They are a little more abstract than his former work, but in most cases are based on an idea or feeling. Those who know his work will sense his intention. Others will, I imagine, give them their own personal interpretation, which is just as valid.

"The important thing is that they communicate, and they will if given enough time. Some feel they should have gone to New York — that Toronto isn't quite ready. Let's hope this isn't so.

"Invitations to exhibitions here (in Paris) are beginning. A couple of interesting ones are "L'Oeil de Boeuf" (The Bull's Eye). All the works are round or oval. York has

sent two six-foot ovals, one a collage, one oil. The other is *Painting Based on Poetry*. A certain poem (that effects the painter) or lines, are chosen — they may be incorporated in the painting.

“Then, sometimes, a poet is moved by a painting and writes a poem.

“This has happened with a work of York’s. Both types will be included in the show and reproduced together in a publication that comes out quarterly, edited by the poet Henri Chopin.”

The temporary ex-patriates have just returned from several weeks in Turkey and Greece. Mr. Wilson sketched along the mosques and minarets, and worked for a week on the island of Ydra, also a seven-day cruise of the Greek islands.

At a performance of an old Greek play, ‘King Rodolinos’ at the second-century Herodes open-air theatre of Dionysius (beside the Parthenon) Mrs. Wilson reports, “authentic costumes, magnificent ruins for backdrop... and tiers of steps seating 5,000... with acoustics so perfect, right to the top step, a whisper can be heard.”

Also in Rome recently a visit with the new Ambassador, Jules Leger, brother of Cardinal Leger of Quebec.

“We had lunch in the beautiful garden on Appia Antica. The house is a creation, using some of the natural rock and catacombs for walls, the dining room a tunnel-shape catacomb, huge crystal chandeliers hung from the stone ceiling... an ancient mosaic floor... ancient statuary, fragments, columns everywhere in gardens, walls, windows, doorways.” (An added note: one could keep the antiquities dug up on one’s property if they were attached to something on the property.)

We flew home in October for York’s exhibition of “gouaches” at the Roberts Gallery and York was welcomed as a favourite son. We were guests of the Sam Zacks’ at the

Benvenuto (our house being rented). While we were hanging the exhibition, the Telegram popped in for a last minute photo while discussions were going on on the Air as to what “gouaches” were and, reaching for their dictionaries... Excerpts:

Paul Duval, Telegram: ...like Piper noted for large architectural commissions, gouaches at Roberts... the semi-abstract fantasies reveal wit and humour... rich colour...

Kilborn, Star: York Wilson’s exhibition... possess disarming modesty... Wilson’s real abilities no longer sacrificed to fashionable, but have been explored for own sake.

Ross Bradley, Director of the Sarnia Gallery hurried down to the Roberts Gallery the day before the opening and selected a gouache for the Sarnia Gallery, Oracle.

The Women’s Committee of the AGO’s 16th Annual Exhibition showed two of the new gouaches, Galion and Sculpture.

Mary Jukes, Globe and Mail interviewed Lela Wilson:

IN PARIS ARTIST’S WIFE STUDIES

“Just like a Paris day,” ash blonde Lela Wilson said of the grey, rain-lashed landscape outside her Benvenuto hotel window. She is in Toronto for a two-week holiday with her celebrated husband... They return tonight to their Paris studio where Mr. Wilson has been painting for the past two years...

“The Parisians make romance of their winter greys, but the climate is just like London, penetratingly damp and cold,” she said.

Married to an artist who spends six hours a day before his easel, what does she do with herself...? “Study,” she confessed, “six days a week.”

The day begins with breakfast early... to make an 8:30 deadline at the Sorbonne, “because the lectures... are so popular, late-comers have to stand,” she explained.

“They come in all kinds of costumes—African, Indian—to listen to Sorbonne professors talk about French literature, poetry, architecture, geography, art, history, old castles and politics—no one, not even de Gaulle, escapes candid and often searing criticism.”

The afternoon sessions, three days a week are given over to French grammar, “Difficult at first but now comprehensible, ...because with many French friends who don’t speak English, we must speak French.”

The Wilsons are gregarious. They either dine in their studio or at someone’s house almost every night... served sometimes between 8:30 and 9 o’clock...

Their Paris studio is bigger than the one they had built in Toronto but the kitchen is nothing but a hallway with a furnace tucked into its end... built before central heating, the coal... stored in a hall closet. “We can get the place as warm as we want if we don’t forget to keep the furnace fed.”

In the kitchen (“so narrow York can’t pass me...”) there is a three-burner gas stove over an oven without a heat gauge. However the Wilsons have kept house in so many countries—Mexico, Canary Islands, Italy—they have adjusted easily. One advantage is their proximity to Levis, a large food section in Paris, where each shop keeper is a specialist in one thing, even bread.

The bread queue begins to form at 12 noon... the Levis breadshop makes 47 varieties, among them a loaf designed by Picasso in the shape of a hand...

“No dinner is complete without a cheese course,” she said (her favourite, Boursault—made in three flavours—plain, with garlic, or fine herbs).

Dinner she described as a long session. The French like to eat and talk—leisurely sipping their wine, winding up with a demi-tasse of very strong coffee.

She said you can't find an uncooked beet in Paris. This means beet greens are out as a vegetable, but the root, cooked fresh daily and brought to vegetable stalls is full of flavour.

(The photo was taken in Benvenuto Place beside the marble damsel sculpture.)

Nora Harper, Paris '62, comments for Toronto Star:

The Wilsons have just returned to Paris from six-week tour of Turkey and Greece... "For an artist it is necessary to travel. Only by seeing other countries and their art does the artist get the comparative values, which permit him to develop and renew himself," Mr. Wilson explained.

"In my recent paintings there is, for instance, a distinct change in colors. Experts will see immediately that these works could not have been painted anywhere else but in France.

"Now, for example, I have brought back about two dozen sketches from our trip to the Near Orient and Greece. These sketches are strictly figurative. From them I will paint larger canvases. And those will be abstractions," he said.

This was my clue to ask Mr. Wilson to explain the difference between 'abstract art' and 'non-figurative painting.'

"Non-figurative paintings," he told me, "are not intended to relate to any known object or to show any known object. In abstract paintings, on the other hand, the artist abstracts (or separates) a part, an idea or a detail from a figurative picture which represents a known, visual object."

According to Mr. Wilson, abstract art is a more generous kind of painting, calling for collaboration from the viewer. In it the painter gives leeway to the public's imagination instead of forcing his own 'impressions' on the public.

"Contemporary painting is again going toward configuration," Wilson said. "But instead of the classic, photographic style, it will take on new, different aspects."

Thinking of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and

other artists known also for their unhappy emotional lives, I was curious to know how and when a painter creates his work.

“A creating artist is much of the time in a state of deep concentration and tense inner emotion,” York Wilson said. “Therefore an artist is often not what would be called, a ‘nice person.’ ‘Normal conditions’ are no fertile ground for art.”

“I can not be disturbed when I work or the creative emotion would be broken and lost,” he emphasized.

Mrs. Wilson knows about that. She is the one who guards her husband’s studio hours on end when he is in a creative mood and has to paint.

The world knows York Wilson only when he is not working. Then he is relaxed, friendly, witty. A great artist and... an extremely nice person.

Mr. Wilson has spent the last two years in Paris and some 30 of his paintings he did over here in France are now on show in the Roberts Gallery in Toronto.