

XVIII

1957 – 1958

York welcomed back to Canada - Two big exhibitions, Montreal and Toronto - Acclaim by Michel Seuphor, internationally known author and art critic - We fly to Los Angeles - A month in Mexico with the McCartney Samples, British Consul in Toronto - We buy a New York studio at 215 Bowery - The Great Danger to painting is too much money - Two murals for the Prince Arthur (Thunder Bay) General Hospital - A Toronto critic reflecting Harold Town's jealousies, has nasty word for York's work - He is roundly contradicted by world connoisseurs at home and abroad - York finds himself elected president of the Canadian Group of Painters, founded by the Group of Seven - He finally secures Gallery space permanently for the Group from Bob McMichael at Kleinberg, now unhappily lost - Paul Duval produces his excellent award-winning "Four Decades, The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries," the definitive book on Canadian Art - Dow Corning of Canada requests York to do a mural using their own caulking material, silicon as the medium plus his special powdered colours. He uses the left-over material applying it to our front door at 41 Alcina Avenue, a great success still thirty years later

- Because the silicon dried so quickly these are his only two murals done in finger painting - Completes giant mosaic mural for Bell Canada Headquarters on Adelaide Street West, Toronto.

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York Wilson was welcomed back to Canada in the Spring of 1964 after spending four years abroad, mostly in Paris. Lotta Dempsey of the Globe and Mail remarks:

RETURN OF YORK WILSON

External Affairs Minister Paul Martin performed a happy ceremony in Paris when he officially opened an exhibition of paintings by Canadian artist York Wilson.

The show was held at the important Musée Galliera in Paris with three Canadian government minister in attendance, and France's great man of letters and minister of Culture, André Malraux, among Parisians present.

The formal occasion was marked with a champagne buffet.

Later the Wilsons had a second opening for painters, sculptors and unofficial friends.

Many of the works from the Paris show will be in Montreal and Toronto exhibitions in April.

On our return great preparations were underway to get ready for the two exhibitions in April, one in Montreal at Galerie Agnes Lefort (Mira Goddard) the other in Toronto at the Roberts Gallery. York divided his Paris paintings between the two galleries, both opening within a couple of days of each other, Montreal April 6, 1964. There was a beautiful bilingual catalogue (both galleries) with critiques by two Paris critics and six reproductions, two in colour.

Michel Seuphor, internationally famous author and art critic wrote:

Faut-il se réjouir du rétrécissement du monde et de l'universalité de style qui en résulte dans les arts plastiques? Faut-il se réjouir de l'effacement des écoles locales, des particularismes et du folklore si cher à nos grands oncles? Je le crois. Quoi qu'il en soit, cette évolution vers l'universalité est irréversible. Elle n'exclut d'ailleurs nullement la diversité, car nous savons depuis longtemps qu'il y a autant de styles qu'il y a d'artistes dotes d'une personnalité authentique.

York Wilson me semble un vivant exemple de ce que l'avance. Il est homme et il est peintre avant d'être canadien, et sa peinture est l'expression directe de cette prééminence de l'homme et du peintre sur l'appartenance ethnique ou nationale. "Il n'y a pas d'art national, disait Kurt Schwitters il y a quarante ans, pas plus qu'il n'y a d'art prolétarien. L'art existe en soi et c'est l'art en soi qu'il faut servir."

J'appellerai volontiers York Wilson un lyrique discipline. Tout chez lui est en combine d'élan et de mesure. De sourds accords nous font assister à des sortes de luttes pacifiques, aux calmes amours d'un tempérament enthousiaste que la culture gouverne. La règle qui conduit les effusions comprend une marge de liberté qui fait que les oeuvres semblent se créer elle-même comme ferait la nature, une nature non éruptive ayant désappris toute demeures depuis longtemps.

Aussi la peinture de York Wilson nous promene-t-elle dans un jardin qui est en quelque sorte sa conception de l'homme. Et si ce jardin contient des accidents, des cassures, des champs en friche, s'il possède même son désert préconçu c'est parce que cette conception de l'homme implique une multitude de manières d'être à l'image même de la multiplicité de la nature.

Il y a, dans se peintre, un jardinier visionnaire épris d'immensité, mais dans ce jardinier se cache un poète. Un poète intimiste. Seule la peinture abstraite permet ces heureux accords de dimensions apparemment

inconciliables. Michel Seuphor

(Translation by Lela Wilson)

York Wilson - Should we rejoice that as a result of a shrinking world there is a universality of style in the Plastic Arts? Should we rejoice in the disappearance of local schools, particularisms and the folklore so dear to our forefathers? I think so. However it may be, this evolution toward universality is irreversible. Nevertheless, this does not by any means exclude diversity, for as we have known for a long time, there are as many styles as there are artists endowed with an authentic personality.

York Wilson seems to me to be a living example of what I am saying. He is man and painter before being Canadian and his painting is a direct expression of the pre-eminence of both man and painter, over ethnic or national allegiance. "There is no National Art, said Kurt Switters, 40 years ago, any more than there is a proletarian Art. Art exists as such and Art as such must be served."

I would readily call York Wilson a disciplined lyric. All of him is a combination of energy and direction. The muted harmonies lead to an awareness of a sort of peaceful struggle, to the quiet affection of an enthusiastic temperament governed by sensitivity. The rule which guides creativity allows for a margin of liberty which makes it appear that painting creates itself as Nature does. A Nature non-eruptive, which has long since disavowed all excess.

Thus does York Wilson's painting lead us into a garden which is in some way his conception of man. And if this garden contains accidents, imperfections, fallow land, even its preconceived desert, it is because this conception of man implies a multitude of ways of life, in the image of the multiplicity of nature.

There is, in this painter, a visionary gardener enamoured with immensity, but in this gardener is hidden a poet. A

poet of intimacy. Only abstract painting permits these propitious harmonies of apparently irreconcilable dimensions. Michel Seuphor

Frederic Megret, a Paris art critic and writer had this to say in the bilingual catalogue:

Le don de soi, pour une conscience digne de ce nom, mène toujours à une conception du monde ou plutôt à une redéfinition quasi cosmique de ce qui nous entoure. Depuis les beaux jours de l'impressionnisme, on l'a bien insulté, le public, pour n'avoir pas su "lire" Monet ou Sisley. Aussi ce public, échaudé encore avec le cubisme, s'est-il prêté ces dernières années à une surenchère qui empêchait de distinguer de plus en plus la vraie peinture, celle qui s'enroule perle par perle autour du cou de l'humanité.

Le public a ressenti ces derniers temps, c'est indéniable, le besoin de revenir à un peu de doute, le besoin de ne pas accepter n'importe quel art, c'est-à-dire qui soit sans souffrance et sans responsabilité. C'est pourquoi lorsqu'on entrait en décembre dernier au Palais Galliera de Paris, qui exposait cinq peintres canadiens, on pénétrait d'emblée dans l'univers d'une vraie peinture, d'un artiste sur. Le public parisien ne s'y est pas trompé, même s'il ignorait que l'homme de Toronto avait peint, entre autres périodes, d'admirables Venise.

York Wilson a voulu depuis remettre en cause son cas de créateur, qu'il reconstruise le paysage savoureux au Mexique ou qu'il analyse à l'aigu l'émotion éprouvée l'été au dessus d'un parc parisien.

Entre ses deux ateliers où il s'isolait comme un moine enlumineur, le peintre canadien, même s'il avait ressenti le besoin de son air, a si peu vécu à Paris depuis quatre ans qu'il en a pratiquement ignoré le carrousel pictural. Nulle doctrine ne saurait d'ailleurs retenir le peintre dans un champ clos et commode. Comme nulle recette ne peut inquiéter chez lui, qui annonce toujours l'inévitable

scélrose. Non, devant les heureuses compositions de York Wilson, chaudes de leurs couleurs et fraîches dans le même temps de leurs glacis subtils, on éprouvé la sensation de déjà vu. Où? C'est parce que l'artiste de Toronto peint le libre visage, toujours recommence, de la lumière.

Frederic Megret

York Wilson - The gift of oneself for a conscience that is worthy of the name, always leads to a conception of the world where a redefinition almost cosmic from which we surmise. Ever since the fine days of impressionism the public has been reproached for being unable to «read» Monet or Sisley. This same public, having been upset again by Cubism, in recent years has indiscriminately acquired paintings without regard to their genuineness as Art that in one way or another enriches humanity.

It is undeniable that, as a result of previous experiences, the public has felt the need to be somewhat hesitant about accepting just anything—that is to say any art that is shallow and meaningless. Consequently, last December when one entered the Musée Galliera in Paris where five Canadian painters were exhibiting, one entered, immediately, into the universe of real painting, of the genuine artist. The Parisians made no mistake here, even though they had not known the fine Venetian canvasses painted by this Torontonion in an earlier period. Since that Venetian period York Wilson has applied his creative abilities to reconstructing the landscapes he enjoyed in Mexico or to analyzing to the limit the emotional re-actions to the Park in summer that his studio overlooks.

In his two studios where he worked in monastic isolation this Canadian painter, though he felt the need of the Paris atmosphere, «lived» very little of Paris itself during those four years, preferring to avoid the painting Merry-go-round.

No doctrine should imprison a painter in closed and comfortable environs. The painter must not be concerned

with any one formula as this would preclude an inevitable sclerosis. When facing York Wilson's lively compositions, warm in colour and refreshing at the same time by subtle glazes, one has the sensation of rediscovering a previous visual experience. Where or Why? Perhaps because the artist from Toronto is painting the free and ever changing image of light. Frederic Megret

Montreal Gazette, by Dorothy Pfeiffer: Wilson painted throughout Canada, including the North West Territories and Labrador... Mexico, Canary Islands, Morocco, Spain, Italy, France, Turkey, Greece and Holland...

A week later:

...York Wilson started his career as a representational painter, came to his present form of abstraction through personal art experience... told me during a prolonged and stimulating conversation at his exhibition—which to my mind is one of the finest held in Montreal for some time--that he has frequently been asked to «teach» abstract painting. «It cannot be taught,» he said. «Abstract art must evolve. Abstraction or expressionism, is born only through personal experience. In other words,» he added, «basic training in drawing, composition and technique is imperative to any fine art expression.» Titles are unnecessary in Wilson's paintings. Each colorful panel filled with friendliness and *joi de vivre* reaches out to the viewer «What experience, or mood, or place do I remind you of?» it silently asks. Whatever it is, one recognizes it at once, be it gay, or else nostalgic; The souvenir of a former fact, or of a dream. A sail on a river in France, or Greece? A whiff of the torrid lands of Africa? Perhaps a myth, or legend, as in Wilson's large cloisonne-like image, «Roi Christophe»—the ancient Haitian monarch who drove his terrified soldiers off a precipice... In a recent work, «Taos» acquired the other day by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for its permanent collection, one hears the beat of ritual music and the sombre roll of drums. The painting

projects also the arid soil of Mexico; the dark shades of mourning and the intense qualities of religious processions. Another, «Orage» combines the steel-blues of lightening with the charcoal-greens of thunder-clouds. Seen under strong light, the painting fairly quivers with color. When the light is turned down, it glimmers and glows like a baleful Olympian eye... A pure abstraction is reproduced, «Toccata en Orange.»

Montreal Star, Robert Ayre: «...The one-man show... which welcomes him back to Canada also gives us an opportunity to have a good look at him. He appears regularly with the Royal Canadian Academy, the Canadian Group of Painters and the Ontario Society of Artists, has been in three biennials and frequently turns up in the Montreal Museum's spring show, but he hasn't had a solo here for 12 years.

Much has happened since his last appearance at Watson's in 1952. At that time he was just at the opening of his new life. He had turned his back on Toronto and a successful career as a brilliant advertising designer and illustrator and had gone to Mexico as the first step in the long pilgrimage into art for its own sake.

This does not mean that he cut himself off from the world and climbed into the ivory tower. In 1954, he was in Montreal, painting the mural at McGill University, three years later, he painted the two big murals... Imperial Oil, Toronto and the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts. The figurative is important in all these, and even today you can frequently trace the original subject from which the composition has been abstracted—the buildings of Neuilly, for example, the boats of La Rochelle and other harbors: and I remember, though it isn't in the present show, the canals and gondolas of Venice. The deeper he goes in the study of form, color and light, the more he departs from the scene before his eyes in order to distil its essence as he remembers it. You will not see the domes,

pinnacles and pigeons of St. Mark's in «Splendour of Venezia» or the gondolas and the palaces: what you will see is a gorgeous mass of color above a high horizon and its reflection below. Taos, recollected half a world away in Paris and a long time after, is remembered as a dry, desert place in a handsome design of brown stains and shadows without depth. Parc Montsouris is a fresh greenness. Places are jumping-off places. Many of York Wilson's paintings—like the big blue presence of «King Christoffe» or the «Toccata en Orange»—have no reference to place at all. We don't need to be reminded of anything else. The painting is the experience. It is not a momentary excitement but an experience that lasts. Color and mood captivate you immediately, but you do not apprehend their full quality, and the subtlety of the form relationships, without long contemplation. That is as it should be, for York Wilson is not an action painter, throwing paint on the canvas like a Hofmann or an Appel. He is not so much the man of passion as the builder, the researcher who takes time and thought to compose. But the vitality, the eager response to what he has seen, the delight in what he is doing, keep the whole thing alive. This exhibition is one pleasure you should not miss.

The other part of the work painted in Paris during the four year sojourn opened the following evening at Roberts Gallery in Toronto.

Globe and Mail, Kay Kritzwiser: The London Art Gallery bought Wilson's Lepanto and the Winnipeg Gallery his painting Ydra - The effervescence of interest that swirled around the gallery... from reaction to his impressive and prodigious output of the past six years... - Though Canada may have been denied the results of Wilson's quiet preoccupation with the sweep of color of Italy, Greece and France, French galleries have been very much aware of

him—as a painter, not as a Canadian...

A letter from a fellow artist:

April 11,

1964

Dear York;

I can't tell you how thrilled Valerie and I were with your exhibition! Your colour is truly magnificent and the whole show will be an inspiration to me for a long time to come...

Hilton (Mac) Hassell

Globe and Mail, April 18: ...Last July when Joseph P. McCulley, Warden of Hart House, visited York Wilson in his Paris studio, the Toronto painter had just finished Honfleur, a big, bright canvas, seething with life. When McCully saw the painting again at York Wilson's current show at the Roberts Gallery, he was a man undone. At the end of the university year, the Hart House art fund had ebbed, but Mr. McCully persuaded friends to volunteer sufficient contributions to make up the difference and Honfleur now belongs to Hart House. «It's our first York Wilson,» Mr. McCully said. «It's one of the really fine paintings in the show. In this old Gothic building, it will be like an open window.»

The Telegram, April 18, Barrie Hale: The York Wilson exhibition at the Roberts Gallery is enjoying sales that «...even exceed our expectations,» according to Mr. Wildridge. And as this exhibition marks Wilson's return to Canada after many years in France, Italy, Morocco and Turkey, expectations of a successful showing were high. Major sales of large canvases include Ydra, to the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Honfleur to Hart House, and Lepanto to the London Art Museum. The exhibition includes 40 oils and 20 gouaches...

The Toronto Star, April 18, Elizabeth Kilbourn: THERE

ARE TWO intensely and beautifully decorative shows in town this week, Jean McEwen at Moos and York Wilson at Roberts. Of the two, I prefer Wilson. He is after all, a highly accomplished painter who can pull off «Paris,» a handsome atmospheric and finely structured painting... His gouaches are exquisite; «Orange» and «Nocturne» for instance are too seductive to be trusted. Downstairs at Roberts, where they hang, is like a jeweller's showcase of precious stones, glowing and shimmering with an inner light. But they lack the hardness.

The Aurora Banner, April 30, photo by Eric Hansen: a large composite photo of artist with several of his paintings. ARTIST BACK - York Wilson, one of Canada's leading artists...

The Globe and Mail, June 27: Outshining everything else in the Roberts Gallery's constantly-changing summer group show is York Wilson's huge, floating-image abstract titled Endymion. Endymion, so legend has it, was a beautiful youth, a hunter, shepherd or king, whom Zeus granted eternal youth through eternal sleep. The subject of Wilson's painting may escape you but the power can't. The strong blues, blacks, greens and whites merge forcefully over each other, fully suggestive of mythological spirit.

The Globe and Mail, September 3, Zena Cherry: ART THAT BUSINESSMEN BUY, - The new Arthur White Galleries... is giving a large black-tie preview party of THE CORPORATION COLLECTS. The purpose is to show what businessmen buy for their offices... and those participating... The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce is lending a York Wilson canvas done during the Mexican period...

OSA Report: ...Honors to York Wilson for the exhibitions at Roberts Gallery and Agnes Lefort, Montreal. Note: OSA

files placed in Provincial Archives!

The RCA's 84th exhibition still travelling opened at the National Gallery January 16, 1964 with Wilson's Sailing Carthage - the 85th opened in November at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art which included Wilson's major canvas, Endymion, and Dr. Franz Meyer, Director of the Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland, who opened the exhibition, chose it for an honourable mention.

Margaret McLaughlin (painting signature, Alexandra Luke) left a collection of art to the R.S. McLaughlin Art Gallery in Oshawa, which included a gouache, Monument by Wilson. This pleased York being his first work in the McLaughlin Gallery.

I don't know which artist Zena Cherry had been talking to but her column in the Globe and Mail was headed:

Abstract Impressionism... small strokes and muted colors give elegance and three leading artists are York Wilson, Philip Gustin and Jean-Paul Riopelle...

On our return from Paris we flew to Los Angeles to spend the month of May with our daughter and family whose anthropologist husband had a house on the campus of UCLA at Northridge. In December we flew to Mexico for a month with the McCartney Samples (Mac and Elsie), current British Consul General in Toronto.

York had been chosen to do two murals for the new Port Arthur General Hospital and a mosaic mural for the outside of the new Bell Canada building, Adelaide Street, Toronto. He holed up in his San Miguel studio doing research on medicine and communication.

While in Mexico we met Dorothy wife of a New York University professor. She wished to sell her New York studio at 215 Bowery, corner of Rivington. It was well-furnished for living in, though illegal the building was full of live-in artists. Her furnishings were for sale but one paid a \$150 a month rental. We decided to take it and stopped over on our way back from Mexico. It was quite suitable, on third floor, large, a small kitchen, bathroom, small storage room, endless windows, heated during working hours but a small wood-burning stove for other times. We left a few things there, planning to return shortly, which we did and soon had it in shape. The district was full of «wine-os,» across the street was a bar and they slept during the night on the Rivington side, bodies lined up on the sidewalk. They were respectful, polite, always asking for a handout, if successful, they marched right into the bar. The Salvation Army soup-kitchen was a few doors in the other direction.

Canadian Industries Limited catalogue: The C.I.L. Collection of art has been wending its way across the continent since 1962, its home is the many cities and towns it visits...

C.I.L. acquired Wilson's Parc Montsouris from the Lefort exhibition and was included with the Collection when it came to Toronto later in 1964. Apparently C.I.L. withdraws some works and adds new ones, keeping it currently representative of art in Canada.

When Jack Nichols was viewing his mural in the entrance to the Salvation Army's new headquarters in Toronto one day, a staff member approached and asked how he liked it:

«I like it very much,» he said «Do you?» «Oh yes,» she

replied. «It's by York Wilson, you know.» (The reviewer from the Globe and Mail went on to say) «The Salvation Army does in fact have a mural by Wilson but it's on a wall in the Prayer Room.»

An article in the Financial Post headlined: BE SURE YOU'RE ON THOSE LISTS IF THE ART BUG HAS BITTEN YOU. John Irwin says: «Sales of Canadian Art are booming... In Montreal Mira Goddard, Lefort Gallery... says the widening public interest is even more important compared with last year's...» In Toronto, Roberts Gallery, doubled pre-Christmas business compared with last year's. It drew a lineup at this preview of works by such top-rate Canadian painters as Jean-Paul Lemieux, A.J. Casson, York Wilson... Red Stars, indicating «sold,» appeared on more than 60 paintings. That means that more than half the paintings were sold before the show was opened to the public...

In the 1964-65 file is a bundle of clippings and pages of notes; obviously material carefully selected in preparing a lecture. Unfortunately a copy of the lecture or where it was given doesn't exist, but the following items were among his notes.

York Wilson's concern - the new «isms,» «Pop,» «Op,» and so on - rise in prices. 1958 a complete revolution in promotion, taste-making, dealing in money and directing artists - artists no longer creators. The New York art scene - the commercialization has been increasing since the big money hit the scene in the mid-50's. What's the word? Pop is chic thus going out - Op is in - hard edge? doubtful - abstract expressionism? Big names in, the rest out. Statements by critics Greenberg, etc., artists Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg.

Goldzahler says,

As art is exposed more quickly the public's appetite may be growing, more voracious - mass media, increasing the

fine arts coverage, help to create an audience more concerned with the new than the good. Art has ceased to be a luxury, it has become a negotiable commodity with a large potential profit for the intermediary, agent, dealer or whatever. More than ever before, the genuine dealers, collectors and artists should get together to as far as possible assist in controlling stampedes that are generated by the unscrupulous dealers, collectors or artists. The greatest danger to the future of painting is too much money, taking it from the hands of the real audience, the individual in his home and putting it in the hands of dealers, like Marlborough. Art has become «show Biz.»

Many genuine artists, collectors and dealers felt the same concern about the future of art. A New York sculptor, Sam Goodman, expressed his feelings about the art world around him in his exhibition at the Gertrude Stein Gallery the subject of which was excrement. To quote from a review at the time:

The work of Sam Goodman, this show was intended as a comment on the art world, the museum-and-gallery setup, and the gullibility of collectors.

Featured were 23 excremental sculptures in cast stone, varying from normal human size to 5-foot dripping superman accumulations. Art collectors bought the products in quantity.»

The Port Arthur General Hospital were constructing a new building and asked York to design two murals; a long narrow one for the entrance (63" x 28') «The History of Medicine» and a smaller one (7' x 12'). It was a difficult commission as the Board wanted something more figurative than York was wont to do. He studied the history of medicine from earliest known times to the present day. Here are his notes:

This mural deals with various ideas, superstitions and

treatments related to health, both mental and physical. Since earliest times the stars have been used by primitive people in finding answers to all their problems. Masks were used to ward off evil spirits which were believed to be the cause of most ailments. Amulets, talismen and charms of all kinds were worn - and still are to protect the wearer. The Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and the early Christians used amulets for staunching the blood - also in cases of canine madness. Later the Aztecs used pendants made of jasper in staunching the blood. One of the early medical practitioners was IMHOTEP, an Egyptian who was deified about the year 3000 B.C. Temples were built in his name and thousands sought cures and health at these temples. There are many other personalities, not included, for instance the Persian named MAZDA (about 2080 B.C.) who wielded such influence that only worshippers of Mazda were allowed to practice medicine.

Treatments in early times were applications of heat and cold - counter irritation - baths - trephining, which dates back to Neolithic times (about 3000 B.C.) and suction.

Greeks and Romans took curative baths of Asses milk, sand, peat or ammonia about 1700-1400 B.C. Probably the first written prescription was found at Nippur, Mesopotamia - it is a Cuneiform tablet of about 2000 B.C. Aesculapius and Hygiaea were God and Goddess of health - protecting Divinities in Greece. Temples were erected to Aesculapius in many parts of Greece - near healing springs or on high mountains. The practice of sleeping (incubatio) in those sanctuaries was very common, it being supposed that the God effected cures or prescribed remedies to the sick in dreams. The Snake's connection with medicine seems to have originated when Aesculapius was taken from Epidaurus in the form of a snake and a temple was assigned to him on an island in the Tiber. He was taken there to assist in averting a pestilence - or it could have come from the Minoan civilization cult of the serpent, which has also been associated with Aesculapius.

Herbs have been used since earliest times as «cure alls» and their application has usually been timed according to the stars. In the 2nd century CHARABA knew of more than 500 medicinal plants. As recently as the last century the stars were consulted re herbal treatments. In Culpepers Complete Herbal in Chapter 15: «The way of mixing medicine according to the cause of the disease, and parts of the body afflicted.» «This being the key of the work, I shall be somewhat more diligent in it, I shall deliver myself thus: 1. To the vulgar. 2. To such as study astrology; or such as study astrologically.»

Hippocrates (400 B.C.) is known as the Father of Medicine. He was the first to disassociate the subject of medicine from superstition. The Staff and intertwining Snake symbol of medicine shown in portrayals of Aesculapius. The Mask below is another type of mask used in all centuries up to and including the present day. North American Indian medicine men still use them in traditional dances.

The Egyptian Mummy was used as a sure panacea for all ills in the dark ages, in what way the medieval medicine man used the mummy, I do not know.

The Thermometer developed by Sanctorius (1551-1636) although a very crude and inaccurate instrument, opened up all sorts of new possibilities for Modern Medicine.

The area following indicated information being collected and classified related to every aspect of the human body. The examination of the behavior of thousands of types of bacteria, the use of Xrays, Electrographs of moving parts, in fact the application of every manner of modern research tool in gathering and classifying exact information.

In turn this information is channelled most often through the hospital and is used scientifically to improve and prolong life.

Borneo medicine men tried to entice «spirits» out of the sick into weird carvings symbolizing a disease.

The second smaller mural was to be at the end of a corridor which ran into an intersecting corridor where people should turn to the right, not the left. York felt people go in the direction of lighter colour so this abstract mural is titled Night and Day. He was uneasy presenting an abstract mural to the Board and spent most of the time explaining the History of Medicine mural, passing quickly over the smaller one. It pleased him that both were accepted and he installed the finished murals painted with vinyl acetate on canvas, in April, 1965. He was later told that the small abstract mural with the lighter colour on the right side did seem to automatically direct people to the right.

A York Wilson retrospective was mounted by the Sarnia Art Gallery, March 1-31 - Queens University, April 4-22 - Confederation Centre, P.E.I., May 1-31 - Roberts Gallery, Toronto, June 15-30, 1965.

The reviews by Canadian and American papers of the retrospective exhibition while in Sarnia were excellent - the second stop was the Agnes Etherington Centre at Queens University and the Kingston Whig Standard (critic Large) reported:

York Wilson is Master of Mood... fortunate indeed the exhibition stopped here, because it provides unusual opportunity to view... by an important Canadian artist... a patient composer... gain meaning only after considerable study...

The 3rd stop, Confederation Centre, Charlottetown, P.E.I.: ...highlights being York Wilson's retrospective... Internationally known...

The 4th stop, Roberts Gallery, Toronto: The Globe and Mail, Kay Kritzwiser, ...This wonderful bursting vitality of York Wilson's color began its real hold on him in Italy—

what a love affair he had for the reds of Italy...

1965 marked a new art critic at the Telegram, Harry Malcolmsen, a Toronto lawyer. In January he had taken a whack at York before the retrospective arrived in Toronto. He featured Town, Coughtry and Etrog but in order to damn Wilson he had to reach back almost a year to his last exhibition as there hadn't been one since and I quote:

On the debit side, 1964 had its share of clinkers. The York Wilson show was up before I appeared in this space, so I didn't get a chance to remark on the inconsequential candy floss that Wilson turns out. I didn't think anyone took Wilson seriously anymore, and I was therefore saddened to see a presumably impecunious institution like the London Public Gallery laying out nearly \$2,000 on a painting that in 15 years they won't want to hang.

Later, Malcolmsen had a heyday damning the retrospective when it reached Toronto:

...His retrospective should be an important event. So it is in the sense that it establishes Wilson as a figure of no consequence in Canadian art. The Emperor turns out, has no clothes... Wilson's glaring weakness as a draughtsman is apparent... The show suggests Wilson left figurative work not because he had exhausted its possibilities, but because he never mastered its demands. The themes are borrowed: Landscape from A.Y. Jackson, ballet scenes from Degas. The insipid quality, the lack of vigor or characterization are Wilson's own... Wilson produces a picture-postcard sparkle, a meaningless brightness and gaiety. The sole merits of these syrupy concoctions are the brilliant colors and the intensity of light, though the bright light (one of the most shopworn of painting cliches) hardly makes Wilson's work distinctive. There is nothing in the show to suggest Wilson might ever have been significant; but the worst features: compositionless

meanderings, lollipop color and decorative sweetness are the trademarks of the school of Paris painting full-blown... I find nothing to recommend Wilson's work. It is tepid in inspiration, wholly without originality, and lacking in technical competence...

With Malcolmson's brilliance it's difficult to understand why he isn't a world figure, he could set art connoisseurs straight like André Malraux, Jean Cassou, the Uffizi Gallery, the American Encyclopaedia and our good Canadian curators; why, the Canadian Who's Who hasn't even heard of him!

A clipping from Max Beerholm's book by David Cecil comes to mind:

Turgenev, Max said, appreciated that criticism is a delightful pastime for the critics - that, even, it may be delightful for their readers, but, he says, it has nothing to do with the artist, nor with the process by which art is achieved.

While York was away, he came home to find that the executive of the Canadian Group of Painters had elected him President. They knew if he was consulted he would have turned them down but they were desperate having difficulties finding places to show their work which caused lack of interest with some of their members. They felt he was the only one to come up with a solution if only to phase out the Society but leave some sort of record as to their accomplishments in furthering Canadian Art.

This was a national society, it's founder members were the Group of Seven and artists of merit were added over the years. York gave much time and thought to the situation, holding many meetings with the executive. Finally he came

up with the idea of finding a public gallery which would give them a room in permanence to exhibit each member's donated work, and produce a definitive book on Canadian art with excellent reproductions of each artist's work. The book's preparation was to be given to our most knowledgeable critic, Paul Duval. Paul was delighted, this was the sort of thing his long interest and training in «Art:» especially Canadian Art served him well.

York set about talking to publishers, waiting for decisions, being turned down until finally Clarke-Irwin agreed to produce a book of fine quality. He then set out to find a public gallery who would exhibit the work of each artist permanently. It was hard going but finally he struck an agreement with Bob McMichael of the McMichael Conservation Gallery in Kleinberg. Bob agreed to allocate a room permanently to the Canadian Group of Painters. It wasn't large enough to hang all the members at one time, so it was agreed that all members would hang six months of each year. Members were requested to donate paintings which would be juried. Since the OSA had a great bank of slides of works and many members belonged to both societies, Syd Watson and York and all wives spent many an evening pouring over slides. When the reproduction proofs were ready, York alone would hold out until they were the best possible. All this took about seven years and an excellent book was the result, published in 1972 and it won an International Award, 1973 Leipzig Gold Medal for the «Most beautiful Book of the Year.» The title: «Four Decades - The Canadian Group of Painters and their Contemporaries.» It has been the definitive book on Canadian Art ever since. There was over \$20,000 in the CGP bank account

and Isabel McLaughlin must be given credit for her generosity. It was decided to donate copies to libraries across Canada and to Embassies abroad.

It was discovered just before York Wilson's death in 1984 that the CGP Charter was in safe keeping with the lawyer, the son of Erickson Brown. This should go to the McMichael Gallery. Sadly the McMichael Gallery since taken over by the Government has not followed the terms of the contract as arranged by York Wilson with Bob McMichael. The Collection of the works of The Canadian Group of Painters is dispersed and no longer hung as a unit. I have written to two recent Directors including Barbara Tayler as to the arrangement struck with Bob McMichael (they knew nothing about it) and they promised to look into it. I have also informed them as to the whereabouts of the Charter.

Harold Town had made such unacceptable demands if he allowed his work to be included, threatening he would sue if not carried out, hence it was impossible to include him other than by mentioning his work. He certainly belongs in «Four Decades.» It's interesting that the Globe and Mail asked Harold to review the book. You can imagine what happened; he took a lot of space criticizing the book (real or imagined) mercilessly, including a personal attack on Duval. Paul Duval answered in a gentlemanly fashion but firmly correcting Town's errors, and letters to the editor were all strongly against Town.

A book was published on the life and work of Roy Thomson, business entrepreneur, who was honoured with a British Title «Lord Thomson of Fleet.» He was photographed in front of the mural he commissioned in 1940 by York Wilson of «Northern Ontario» for his new excellent Timmins Press

Building. It was York's first mural and was oil on canvas. I mentioned before that Adele Freeman mourned the demolition of the building, terming it great architecture and a landmark.

The AGO bought one of the ink collages on brown paper, «Le Figaro» from the Paris period which was highly commended by Jean Cassou, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris.

William Miller, President of Dow Corning, Toronto and a Wychwood Park neighbour asked York to do a mural for them that they could take to various Fairs to demonstrate the quality of their products. York decided to use their own caulking material, silicon as his medium, adding his own pure, powdered colour. This was a challenge as it dried so quickly he would have to work fast. Its claim was that it was impervious to fire, water and the elements. Dow Corning supplied York with ample caulking material that he had enough left over to do our front door which was exposed to the elements and paint didn't last very long. With the mural and the door he first mounted fibreglass as a base for the silicon caulking material. Because of the short drying time, these are Wilson's only examples of finger-painting. It is now 30 years since the door was done and it hasn't changed in any way including colour. Ridges are built up in places to 3/4's of an inch and feel like flexible rubber. The caulking material remains flexible therefore doesn't shrink or crack. When the mural studies find a permanent home, the door will be included. For the first few years after the door was finished, William (Bill) Miller examined it regularly for any changes.

An interesting incident occurred when we were in Athens near the end of May in 1966, we were having dinner with the

Cultural Attache, Arthur Blanchette, of the Canadian Embassy. He asked us if we knew a William Miller, the reply was, yes, not only had York done a mural for him but he was a Wychwood Park neighbour. Blanchette explained that Wm. Miller had made an offer to Greece to coat the Parthenon with silicon to preserve its crumbling stone. Did we think this was a serious offer or just some hair-brained idea? We were able to assure him that it was a serious offer. We later learned from Bill that he had made the offer in good faith but due to slow bureaucratic arrangements (Bill had become ill in the meantime and had to resign his position as President) Dow Corning did not carry out the plans.

During this time research had been going ahead for York's next mural for Bell Canada and was installed about July. Kay Kritzwiser tells the story:

WILSON RINGS BELL WITH MOSAICS

Circumstances surrounding the five mosaic murals to be installed shortly on the Adelaide St. facade of the new Bell Telephone building fit together as neatly as the tesserae in the murals themselves. The pattern began in 1957 when Toronto artist York Wilson lived in Venice. On a visit to Ravenna, Mr. Wilson lost his artistic heart to its Byzantine architecture where gigantic mosaics flowed from so many walls. The technique of this ancient form of the mural piqued his curiosity. He visited mosaic studios in Ravenna and watched and learned.

Toward the end of 1963, Toronto artist Franklin Arbuckle visited Mr. Wilson in his Paris studio, accompanied by Ronald Dick, Toronto architect of Marani, Rounthwaite and Dick. The conversation veered to Wilson's involvement with the Ravenna murals.

Last year when Mr. Dick was considering artistic possibilities to complement the soaring facade of the new

Bell Telephone building, he recalled the Paris conversation. Mr. Wilson, who had returned to Toronto, was given the assignment to producing five 20-by-5-foot panels of mosaics to illustrate the theme Communications. Mr. Wilson made working color sketches and armed with these, he went into a partnership with Alex von Svoboda, artist and muralist, which Mr. Wilson regards today as «one of those rare rapports.»

In the Conn-Arts Studio on Bowie St., the working sketches were enlarged to cartoons which were marked off and numbered much like jigsaw puzzle pieces. Then he began the painstaking task of gluing the tesserae—small cubes chipped from patties of glass or marble—face down on heavy brown paper. Gradually the panels were completed, and as each was finished, the numbered jigsaw pieces were packed in separate drawers, ready for installation. The five huge mosaic murals will be installed in cement bases on the building. Three weeks will be required for installation.

Once the tesserae are embedded in cement, the heavy paper will be removed and it will then be possible to see the beauty of an artistic form that had its roots in the Fifth Century. Mr. Wilson has been careful to keep the uneven surfaces which characterized early rustic murals so that the play of light and shadow during day and night, will become a continuous wonder. Rain will sluice away soot. Sun will catch the glitter of gold leaf impregnated between layers of glass—»and costing a fortune,» Mr. Wilson added.

Mr. Wilson's panels tell a clearly visible story in the manner of the vari-colored rough-textured early mosaics. Written communication illustrates actual letters from various cultures and periods, dating from the earliest known writing. Communication Through Drawing is full of symbols, similar to the earliest Lascaux cave drawings. Communication Through Music shows the earliest forms of written music when notes were square or rectangle,

Stylized drums, the earliest forms used, and early instruments are depicted in this panel. Communications Verbal is filled with abstract patterns that resolve into heads, mouths clearly speaking, yet the faces are not identifiable with any race. Communication Through Distance contains symbols of outer space with all lines sweeping upward to a star the symbol of Tel-star.

The beauty and understanding of these five panels of mosaics is for intimate viewing. Unfortunately they are placed so high above eye level and though surrounded by great areas of white marble and night lights, one cannot appreciate them fully. Bell Telephone produced a brochure with the panels of mosaics in colour which is no longer available. York made a small sample of one corner with the actual tesserae which the AIO toured around the country with the final cartoons. Through film would be the only way now that it could be fully appreciated.

The Cardiff Commonwealth Arts Festival in association with the National Museum of Wales organized an exhibition of Canadian Drawings and Prints selected by Professor Norman Yates. He states in his introduction to the catalogue, «that emphasis was placed on individual artists whose work was viable and known to me.» York sent Lion Hunt, one of the early works in india ink on newsprint on board done in the Paris studio. The exhibition opened on September 18 and continued until October 10, 1965.

On August 9 the Toronto Daily Star ran an article: WHAT'S A BUSINESS WITHOUT A MURAL? Among others are mentioned: Imperial Oil, the O'Keefe Centre and Bell Telephone.

A letter arrived from Charles Ross, Representative, Canadian Bible Society, written October 17th, 1965, which reads as follows:

I am a newcomer to Toronto and had occasion only recently to visit the Imperial Oil Building. I was quite unprepared for the thrill of seeing your murals. What creation! To me, you have re-created a tremendous cross-section of time, spanning almost limitless eons, captured it in panorama and built it into a wall. It is a still picture in colour on a three-dimensional screen—and yet it moves with colossal force.

I found myself startled by the reality and clarity of an instantaneous glimpse of creation. The impact was tremendous—thrilling! My immediate reaction was one of deep gratitude for the privilege of feeling, sensing—absorbing a marvellous experience. I moved on thinking, «Thank you—whoever-you-are—for creating that mural.» Now, having learned that it is yours, I want to express my thanks to you for the rich experience of meeting your mural.

The art critic Raul Furtado wrote an essay on York Wilson for Arts Magazine, U.S.A., titled «**York Wilson's Achievement,**» reproducing the left half of the Imperial Oil mural and the marvellous tryptic A Propos d'Afrique (which is like a small mural) in the Ontario Club, Toronto, the overall size is 77 inches x 154 inches.

In October York's work was included in an exhibition at York University through the auspices of Ayala Zacks and William Withrow.

Out of the gloom a voice said unto me

«Smile and be happy: things could be worse»

So I smiled and was happy and behold things did get worse!