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We left at 7 a.m. by boat for Ios and arrived at 9 a.m. Ios has a beautiful, protected harbour, ideal for swimming and the hotel is right on the beach. It is a tremendous basin with only a narrow entrance. The whole area is believed to be the sunken continent of Atlantis, once joined to Asia Minor, and these islands are simply mountain tops or volcanic eruptions. There are 366 ancient churches on Ios, all kept in good repair, mostly opened on special occasions, some once a year celebrating their anniversary. I visited a small 7th century one which is partly below ground and a large 13th century one, quite isolated, along the shore, both pristine white. Apparently it was the custom for fishermen to promise to build a church if they survived a certain storm. The town proper is quite a climb by foot, donkey, ornate donkey-cart or taxi but not steep. Here there is considerable life at sea level, hotel restaurants, cafes, stores, houses, churches, etc. It is quiet here, one sleeps exceptionally well, doors open to the sea and no mosquitoes. There's a tremendous enterprise here with special earth taken from pits and used for porcelain, apparently it hardens the more it is wet. There are many old caves. Homer came from Ios, his tomb has been found there, a three hour ride by donkey; three coins were found in the tomb marked, «Homer of Ios,» one is here in the small museum, one in Athens and one in London. We went into the tiny 7th century church, now half underground, but excavated around, it looked like only a dome, however one steps down to a stone floor, a worm-eaten partition with worm-eaten Icons and a little chapel behind, it has great appeal because it is so simple. We went a distance by boat with friends who wanted to try another beach. The island is rugged and barren, now and then tiny churches poised on peaks to be as close to

the sun as possible, in the belief that one ascends to the sun in death, the Sun was their God. A 250 pound shark was caught one morning in the open sea, brought in and used for food, larger ones not so good.

After two days we were waiting for the boat from Santorini which sails past Naxos and on to Siros our next destination, unfortunately it arrives late at night and is a six hour trip. We passed so many islands en route, there are over 1000, some scarcely inhabited. Naxos our first stop is beautiful with a large city at the port; Pyros second stop, all buildings at sea level with mountains behind. Siros with Hotel Hermes right at the Port had an interesting line of buildings encircling the Port. There were other villages on the island. We left for Tinos the next night, a trip of one hour. Tinos has a picturesque harbour, same line of hotels and outdoor cafes along the quay with a gently rising hill behind, white buildings as usual. There was a large church at the top, «Basilica Santa Maria Virginie, built for the Virgin because legend has it that she freed the island from the Russians; a nun had dreamt that an Icon of the Virgin lay unnoticed for centuries in a small church and its position had been revealed to her, and the «Cyclades» group of islands had been dominated by the Persians, Saracens, Byzantine era, Venetians, Turks and Russians and the Revolutionary flag was raised in 1821, the year the Icon was found. The ancient Greek names of the island, show there was much water and many snakes, from which Poseidon set the island free. The first inhabitants were Ionians from Asia Minor. A hotel there is owned by a naturalized Canadian, who lived in Montreal for 17 years, still owns a house there and returns to be with his mother as long as she is alive. Greek cooking at its best doesn't charm us but we had two fair steak dinners there and were warmly welcomed as fellow Canadians, however the warmth on our part grew a little chilly when he tried to cheat us for such a petty amount on top of his stretched prices. He also served us the most ordinary wine of Greece as a «special.»

A Miss Sdrin, a pharmacist who stopped us to talk on the street said

she would like to take us to see a church, the Aghia Triada, 2-1/2 kilometres from town. On the way we saw windmills to which they attach sails to put in motion and many concrete pigeon houses. The Brothers welcomed us, giving us chairs, water after the long hot walk and delicious Turkish Delight sweets. The church was nicely kept, a simple little church with some good ancient Ikons. The «Secret School» was there where they continued teaching Greek after it was forbidden by the Turks during the occupation. Miss Sdrin gave us a parting gift, a box of Turkish Delight, a specialty of Tinos. It is unbelievably heavy, similar to sand in weight but delicious.

We bid our adieus and sailed back to Athens for painting supplies, revisited the fine Museum, such a rich past in art. The only interesting contemporary work we saw was in murals. There was a tremendous brass and copper mural in a bank, brass plates which maybe average 14" square, but an assortment of sizes fitted together, dull surface through rasping or treatment adding up to a beautiful simple design with some worked on the metal, other parts in raised copper or brass and it can be seen from a distance because of a glass facade. Another building had a white marble mural with the top of the sculptured bas relief polished while the background is mat, in a rolling uneven surface, put together in large pieces, possibly 40" squares. The Olympic Air Lines and bus terminal had a fair mosaic mural, parts delightful but some figures, corny. Our hotel here has a burnt wood mural, quite nice, blacks on the top of the bas relief and white background.

We found we had friends at the Canadian Embassy, the Arthur Blanchettes, whom we met when he was Cultural Attache in Mexico in 1949. They wined and dined us and we had a nice evening. They verified the Wainman-Wood story that Donald Buchanan (more recently Art Director for Expo '67 in Montreal) was killed by a passing car while examining a wheel on his own car. Arthur was most helpful in finding painting materials and sending accumulated sketches back to Toronto.

Arthur Blanchette said they had a letter from a Mr. D.C.R. Miller,

President of Dow Corning, who had offered gratuitously to cover the Parthenon with a silicon to preserve the stone which was corroding with the pollution and age. Did we know him and did we think his offer was a serious one? It so happened that he was a neighbour in Wychwood Park and York had painted a mural for Dow Corning with their silicon caulking material which was used to demonstrate its imperviousness to the elements, fire and pollution. The answer was an unqualified «yes.» We didn't learn until some time later that the generous offer had not been fulfilled. Mr. Miller became seriously ill and resigned as President and the Company did not carry through because of bureaucracy. Mr. Miller still thinks today it was an excellent idea not only would it have slowed up the deterioration of the Parthenon but would have been excellent P.R. for Dow Corning and Canada.

Our next stop was the beautiful island of Corfu June 22, «Durrell» country. York was painting on the balcony of our hotel while singing «Among my Souvenirs.» I suspect what he's painting has little to do with the magnificent scene before him, a beautiful harbour, boats, island, a blue sky and a blue Ionian Sea. Ah what hardships, Oozo before dinner at a sidewalk cafe each night, dinner on the roof garden restaurant, overlooking aforementioned harbour and gigantic Venetian ruins of the 12th century. To make it worse they have an outstanding chef who knows how to cook the most delicious, rich meals, serving superb course after superb course, there's no escaping it as demi-pension is obligatory, the last straw is that it's reasonable. As you can see the strain is unbearable, I've never had such trouble keeping my flesh out of my zippers.

We had two short sessions in Athens this time but had explored new islands, Santorini being the most remarkable but on other trips had spent time on Crete, Rhodes, Patmos, Delos, Mikanos, Ydra, Spetzia, etc. A former Premier of Quebec was Ambassador here but has just had to resign because of publication of a critical political book he had written. We seemed to be

reading mostly «Durrell» those days, I guess because they had lived at Corfu, and Rider Haggard's «She,» these islands offered a narrow choice.

We left for Rome June 28, «The Eternal City» and quickly found a small, reasonable hotel, a little out of the way but near one of the grandest and best-known churches, Santa Maria Maggiore, also near our favourite little mosaic Chapel in the church San Clemente on via Praesade. We did very little sight-seeing this time except to visit old haunts and see friends. The Canadian Ambassador, Bill Crean, we knew from earlier days, had lunch with them as they wanted our opinion on the house they had found and wanted Canada to buy as the Rome residence. The grounds were lovely and spacious but the house a bit small and unimpressive. We had gone through this with the last three Ambassadors in Rome and found none wanted the house of their predecessor. This is such an extravagant way to operate and Canada should establish a hard policy with a permanent residence and staff, after all the residences are permanent in Ottawa. We were back again for the July 1st «Canada Day» garden party which was delightful in that lovely garden and it didn't rain as it had done the day before. We knew very few Canadians but on introduction found many knew us and had stories to tell us about York's paintings that they had or had wanted. It was nice seeing the Don Stewarts again, he used to be a professor at Pickering College in Newmarket, Ontario at the same time that O'Rourke was Headmaster. Together they started a much-needed boys school in Rome.

In the four days we re-acquainted ourselves with the Museums, the Archaeological Museum has quite a collection. July 2 we flew to Paris and were quickly installed in Luc Peire's studio/home as they spent their summers in Knokke, Belgium. A strange thing happened the first night sleeping in Luc Peire's environment. York dreamt a geometric painting, in colour. It was so clear he did a pencil sketch before breakfast, then realizing the colour was important too he intended making a quick colour sketch,

then get on with his own painting but he was still working on the geometric at day's end, completely absorbed. The second night a repeat performance of another geometric painting, drawing before breakfast, colour after, then get on with his own work, but still at it by day's end. There were no more dreams but they had been so forceful he could think of nothing else. Ideas flowed so fast he could scarcely keep up with them, moreover he was completely happy creating one plan after another and when he left for Toronto on September 27, 1966, he had at least 50 for further consideration which included two serigraphs and two tapestries completed in Paris. We pondered how this compelling direction could possibly have happened, though he had many artist friends who painted in the constructivist direction, he had never felt the slightest interest to do so himself. He knew he took his painting ideas with him from country to country, being an experimenter, and used only the local atmosphere, not being susceptible to the influences of the day. Op Art came into being during our previous four year sojourn in France, could this have had any bearing? It became a worry when week after week kept him happily in this direction and no end in sight. He was having a Montreal exhibition with Mira Goddard in the spring and had planned on shaping it up during his three months in Paris based on subjects fresh in his mind from the world trip. He had started lifting the blank canvas each morning which had been on his easel since arrival, putting it down more firmly determined to get back to his own work. Against his will he would turn to his side desk and carry on with the geometric sketches which inundated his mind; to make things worse Mira Goddard unexpectedly turned up at the Paris studio, was not pleased with what she saw, saying she had too many painters in this direction; irrelevant as York was helpless and besides he had always painted for himself.

About this time a New York psychiatrist, an old friend, Dr. Harkavy, turned up at the studio and York told him about the perplexing situation. «Hark,» as we called him, was immediately all attention and said, «Will

you tell me the story from the beginning? Don't leave out a detail, I have never been this close to creation.» York did and Hark said, «It relates to something in your past, it could have been years ago or it could be recent, something you have repressed and it has been triggered by something and has surfaced with force, there's nothing you can do about it; this is real creativity.»

It took some time before we understood what had happened, a brief explanation is that living and seeing so much constructivist art and having little interest, it was pushed down in York's subconscious 4-5 years and forgotten. During the world trip I was conscious of York on a few occasions being attracted to geometric shapes, like the shopping bag in Hong Kong, the stripes in the architecture at Jaipur and the roofs in Ceylon. On arriving in the constructivist painter Luc Peire's studio/home this triggered the explosion, it had been gelling all that time in York's subconscious and had come bursting out unlike anything he had ever seen.

Michel Seuphor (the Dadaist and noted author on abstract art) recommended Yvette Coquil Prince, Atelier du Marais, Paris as the best person to make York's two tapestries from his geometric designs. They arrived several months later in Toronto after we had returned and York was delighted with them. He used the same atelier as Canadian print-maker, par excellence, Jack Nichols, to do his serigraphs (new geometric direction) and had them shipped to Toronto.

During the three months we had the opportunity to get to know the Museums and Art Galleries on the Cote d'Azur as guests of Ettore and Joanne Mazzoleni in the village «La Gaude.» It happened the Herman Voadens were staying at Menton, not far away and we all chased back and forth on the upper and lower Corniches along the Mediterranean and the interesting things there are endless. We visited the striking, new Leger Museum, he was so important because he painted his epoch. Apparently two workmen from a nearby construction (one with red hair and bright

blue overalls) came into his exhibition one day, Leger stared at them and said, «They're so beautiful, how can such beautiful, interesting men be interesting in my dull painting?» Such things started him painting machines and ordinary workers. He was loved and understood by peasants as well as intellectuals. The Maeght Foundation had recently opened the Museum at St. Paul de Vence. The light patterns were carefully recorded for a year by the Spanish architect to obtain the maximum number of best daylight lit hours possible. The sides of the roof roll up, a labyrinth garden had been done by Miro and full of his sculptures; a long garden wall of stones by Tallcoat, so subtle in nuances of greys that prompted York to say «How do you get anyone to OK something like that?» A restored ancient St. Bernard Chapel with a Braque window plus another famous one! Maeght lost a son called Bernard. There's a huge patio of Giacomettis, possibly 30 plus a fabulous collection of «Moderns.» The transient gallery had an exhibition of Kandinsky at the time. There's a hotel «Colombe d'Or» with a famous outdoor restaurant. During meal times there isn't a soul in the large lounge on the street, open windows, no screens, ground level, the walls hung with famous names such as Picasso, Dufy, etc., one can easily step over the window sill. There are many originals, including in bedrooms, a huge mobile by Calder over the pool, other sculptures around the grounds, many artists paid for their meals with their work. They say they were all stolen a few years ago and then all given back; the collection was too well known!

Another attraction was the Bienal de Menton, each year they honour some artist, 1966 there was a special, Salon de Picasso; it was a large exhibition, many of our friends were in it including three Luc Peires. There is the little Chapel by Matisse, the Museum Picasso at Antibes, etc.

Back in Paris work continued and we had some nice evenings visiting friends, Seuphor gave us No. 36 of an edition of 50 books containing nine of his unpublished short stories. We flew back to Toronto on September 27, 1966. York had arrived at the decision he would work on his new

geometric direction evaluating it for a year, not showing it anywhere. He did 180, 12" x 16" sketches, filled several sketch books during the year's travel around the world apart from the geometric episode.

On November 29 a fascinating exhibition of small paintings opened at the Roberts Gallery in Toronto, many of the sketches painted on the spot in various countries. Our foremost art critic for the Globe and Mail Kay Kritzwisser commented:

The warmth of crowds to see his exhibition extended to a near-sellout of 77 canvases, each of which provokes an almost unbearable compulsion to board the nearest airplane... filled books with notes as he travelled... «It was a year of intensive discipline for me... not only the constant adjustment to colours—from the wild gamut of Japan to the dazzling whites and blacks of Greece—but there was the discipline of painting on 12-by-16-inch canvases...» had to remain completely subjective in order to absorb the essence of each country on its own terms.

On the other side of the coin we were to find that much bitterness had developed through jealousies and strangely enough they were all friends or received their art education through Harold Town. Robert Fulford's column in the Toronto Star, December 3, 1966 on the exhibition follows:

TORONTO'S MOST PROMINENT PAINTER IS...

THE INTERESTING THING about R. York Wilson is not his art but his status in the community. For any reviewer hoping to be judged serious, the temptation is to brush him aside in a paragraph or two. But in fact, whether I like it or not, Wilson is in some ways the most prominent painter in Toronto; and at the same time he is perhaps the worst of all the successful artists in Canada.

By «worst» I mean least talented, least original, least interesting, least *serious*. Of all the work which sells well at respectable prices in Canadian art galleries, Wilson's comes closest to being straight commercial art. Its natural home is not the gallery but the slick magazine page.

Yet for Torontonians Wilson's art is nearly inescapable. If you walk often along St. Clair Ave., as I do, then you find yourself living with his Imperial Oil building mural, all 64-by-21-feet of it, the largest mural in Canada when he painted it eight years ago, a vast expanse of intricately contrived boredom. And if you frequently visit the O'Keefe Centre, as I have in recent years, then you find that his still

larger (100-by-15-feet) mural, «The Seven Lively Arts,» executed in 1960, has become a part of your life.

Both of these works, far from growing on me, have looked worse with each passing year.

AND NOW Wilson is once again back from his foreign travels and once again installed at the Roberts Gallery. And, once again, he is the toast of the town, or at least that part of the town that buys oil paintings—48 of his 77 pictures sold in the first few days, most of them at the opening, for prices ranging from \$250 to \$950.

In his many years as a professional artist—he is now 54—Wilson has painted in several styles. In the late 1930s he demonstrated a social realist tendency. In the 1940s he often painted sweet, charming figures. In 1948, in a picture called «Cocktail Party,» he reflected a George Grosz influence. Around 1951 he had a Mexican period—mud huts and women with things on their heads. In the mid-1950s he began the tendency toward abstractions of the kind he does today. Around 1960 he had a Jackson Pollock splash-and-drip phase.

In the 1960s his style has shaken down into a kind of brightly colored abstraction, quite heavily painted, usually related in a distant way to some exotic subject. This time (he has just finished a round-the-world trip) his work reflects subjects from Asia and the Middle East.

A TYPICAL PICTURE in the current show is «To Live For Ever (Hong Kong).» Here Wilson assembles casually a few Oriental symbols, or adaptations of them, pushes these together on the canvas according to no particular pattern, and paints them in various shades of blue and brown. The result of that, static, and uninteresting; it looks like nothing so much as several hundred other pictures by R. York Wilson.

Occasionally, through a combination of brightness and simplicity—as in, say, his «Phnom Penh (Cambodia)»—he achieves a certain dentist's office charm. And even less frequently, his customary style falls away for a minute and reveals beneath the layers of fidgety painting and uninspired design, an artist who is—well, not admirable, exactly, but certainly interesting. «Persian Blues (Iran),» for instance, is at least a competent abstraction. Taken out of this appalling show and exhibited alone, it would stand up fairly well.

But this moderately interesting painter, this other Wilson, vanishes almost immediately, like a ghost. For the most part, the pictures at the Roberts demonstrate that Wilson's layout is careless, his color banal, his insight into subject non-existent.

If, madam, you stand in front of these paintings and say, «My child could do better than that,» then, madam, there is a very good chance you are right. What is important, however, is the fact that Wilson is so well accepted by Toronto art buyers. Year in and year

out, while fads come and go, R. York Wilson is the favorite, whether the buyers want a gigantic mural for the lobby or a little \$250 something for over the mantelpiece. The pattern is by now so consistent that it amounts to a judgment on Toronto taste. The painter this generation has most enthusiastically taken to its bosom is an artist of whom it can only be said that he is always pretty and he is never offensive.

Toronto Daily Star, Tues., Jan. 3, 1967

'York Wilson's painting has great integrity, beauty'

I wish to register a very strong protest against Robert Fulford's Dec. 3 article on the work of the distinguished Canadian painter York Wilson.

This article cannot be dignified by the name of art criticism.

Obviously, Mr. Fulford has a right to dislike the work of Mr. Wilson, or of anyone else, and to say so, but if he does, he can be expected by the reading public and by the editor of the newspaper to explain his dislike in terms of the work itself in relation to the objectives of the artist and the critic's own standards.

Mr. Fulford did nothing of the kind. His article is clearly nothing but a bitter personal attack, very close to slander.

During the last 17 years I have seen many of Mr. Wilson's paintings and reproductions of many others. My profession is writing, but I am also a lover and student of the arts, and I wish to express the opinion that Mr. Wilson's work has total integrity, superlative skill, and great beauty.

In 1964 the French government gave him a one-man show in Paris, and he has had many others in many places. His work has been acclaimed by distinguished art critics.

Charles Allen Smart
Chillicothe, Ohio

Luc Peire, Belgium/School of Paris: First Belgium contemporary artist with work in Museum of Brugges. Honoured by France with solo exhibition in Musee de Luxembourg. Friend of York Wilson since 1952:

Painting is in his blood, York Wilson is one of the most gifted artists I have ever had the opportunity to meet. An extraordinary colourist, a lyrical poet who succeeded in imposing rules of order, purely plastic in form and colour, combined with a feeling of great liberty. His stay in Paris and his contacts with the little «clique» of artists gathered there from the whole world, forming the «School of Paris,» gave birth for York to works in my opinion belong to the very best of his production. Paris was able to see, at the time of his exhibition at the Galliera Museum, a series of pictures of rare quality, adding a page of universal painting, coming from Canada.

Since our meeting in 1952 at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, respect, friendship and humour have remained faithfully present between York, Lela and us. York's paintings, always new, delights and makes one happy.

Luc Peire 27/4/82