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The Canadian writer, Scott Symons did a documentary film on the sculptor, Fred Powell and since York had helped Fred to return to his native Toronto and launch his work there, York was invited to speak in the film about Fred's work.

The Art Gallery of Windsor presented an exhibition of our collection and the Kieran's of Pre-Columbian Art from September 7 to December 7, 1980; the catalogue says:

Over three hundred clay objects and fragments of textiles from various regions of Mexico, Central and South America, comprises a fascinating exhibition for adults as well as children. Dating from as early as 900 years before the birth of Christ, these small figures, utensils and fabrics tell us something about the civilizations that flourished in the New World long before Columbus sailed westward into the unknown. Bring your children or grandchildren, and discover together the kind of treasures that must have astonished Cortez, Pizzaro and the rest of the Spanish adventurers over four centuries ago. We think you will be astounded too!"

Rosalie Cohen opened her gallery "Atelier 19" in Montreal in October, 1980 of "Original Limited Edition Prints" by international artists and several of York's were requested. Roberts Gallery opened a solo exhibition of York's small landscapes which brought affectionate notes from André Bieler and Doris McCarthy: The show is exhilarating and I am enchanted by the small landscapes.

York supported Appleby College by sending two lithographs for its fundraising drive. The O'Keefe Centre celebrated its twentieth anniversary and honoured York mentioning a few highlights in its program:

Mural painter makes his own dramatic history—Twenty years ago, the widely known Toronto artist YORK WILSON made his own

kind of dramatic history just before O'Keefe Centre opened.

When he began to paint his 100-foot mural *The Seven Lively Arts* on the specially treated cement wall of O'Keefe lobby, he ran into problems with the International Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America. Wilson balked at being pressured to join the union. "I can't hang paper," he said.

The union produced a trump card: "But Salvador Dali is a member." Wilson still chuckles at the memory. "I've always hated Dali's work. So I said, "Who the hell is Dali?"

As a way out of the problem and to save face, the union offered to make him an honorary member. Wilson tilted his hard hat to the back of his head and said, "I do not wish to be so honored."

Five art societies—The Royal Canadian Academy, the Ontario Society of Artists, the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour and the Sculptors Society of Canada—rallied to support Wilson by paying 50% of the legal fees involved. "I was given legal advice by Bora Laskin (later chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada), who was then at University of Toronto." Wilson recalled, "It certainly attracted a lot of media attention. The *Times of London* wrote an editorial saying I was the first person to defy the guild since the 17th century. I still have the cartoons and clippings from all over the place." (A photo in his hard hat and box of paints)

Wilson was selected to do the mural by an O'Keefe Committee which included Charles Comfort, former director of the National Gallery of Canada, the late Martin Baldwin, then director of the then Art Gallery of Toronto, A.J. Casson of the Group of Seven and Sydney Watson, director of the Ontario College of Art.

"I worked closely with the architect, Earle C. Morgan and Page and Steele," says Wilson.

Again I, Lela, presented an exhibition for the Toronto Symphony's "Silent Auction" of 21 well-known Canadian artists and York offered a "Dream" for the Dream Auction:

At York Wilson's studio, a discussion of Modern Art - followed by an explanation of the O'Keefe mural in front of the mural at the O'Keefe Centre."

(Purchaser, Marina Cholakis of Helen Simpson Flowers)

"Passionate Spirits" by Rebecca Sisler, a book on the Royal Canadian Academy, published in 1980, comes in for much criticism by Gary Michael Dault, *Toronto Star*. A reproduction of each Academician's work (chosen

by the author) is reproduced in the book. Among the eleven academicians Dault had selected to vilify, York Wilson heads the list. I can only speak for York Wilson; in the first place it's a poor, dark reproduction (not the quality of the books York had edited "Four Decades" and "York Wilson" both by Paul Duval. In the second place Mr. Dault hadn't done his homework as Toluca Market was painted in 1950, the first year York began painting full time. It won the J.W.L. Forester Award and was the first pyroxylin medium painting shown publicly in Canada. The art scene had moved quickly during those thirty years and most of all York Wilson. By 1980 York had been the toast of New York, had been offered a retrospective in any museum in France and had works in at least six foreign museums. In all fairness thirty year old works should not have been chosen to represent the artists in the eighties.

Teri McLuhan (New York) Marshall and Corinne's daughter premiered her film "The Third Walker" in Cape Breton, October 1980 and we were invited along with her parents to the many functions given by the Premier Donald Buchanan and the two Mayors of Glace Bay and Sydney, Cape Breton. We were piped into the theatre by skirling bagpipes. It was Marshall's last trip and a year after his stroke which left him without speech but did not affect his mind. His only utterance was "ugh, ugh" when trying to tell us something during conversations, if we guessed right he would nod. By some strange quirk just before the trip he came out with "Oh boy, Oh boy" with a big smile which seemed to serve well re introductions. During one of the functions he had a beautiful dance with Corinne. Teri had made the film in Cape Breton, it was about twins being mixed at birth in the hospital. Teri was a twin herself without that problem.

Leonard Brooks' 1964 book "Painting and Understanding Abstract Art" had a paperback edition published by Van Nostrand Reinhold, N.Y., and again included York's work. York rejoined the OSA convinced that the President, Kemp Kiefer was doing a good job. He again supported the

Canadian Opera, Appleby College, Windsor Art Gallery and the TSO Silent Auction with his works for their fundraising. The Arts and Letters Club Newsletter for December has eight Wilson drawings to enhance its pages.

It was a difficult year for York from a health standpoint and his pals at the Arts and Letters Club sent along occasional menus covered with get well signatures. An inclusion in York's diary, December 31, 1980:

Marshall McLuhan died last night in his sleep. The immediate feeling is a sense of emptiness - a loneliness, depression and even pessimism. What is the use of anything? What matters? What to do, where to go? A sense of uselessness - I want to paint a tribute to Marshall - where to start? He is too great a mind, too close a friend. Maybe as time goes by I'll know what to do. Not now.

Bob Paterson, York's erstwhile assistant on two murals, published a book "Abstract Concepts of Drawing" in 1981 and I quote:

Cezanne, Wyeth, Whistler, Rothko, Vassarely, Picasso, Pratt, York Wilson and others have used Composition ideas to provide a firm structure to their work, and we can learn from them. To look only at the subject matter would be to miss the true Visual Meaning and Essence of what the artist is communicating. One must come to realize that meaningful works of Art do not just happen by chance, but are thought out and developed by the artist with a particular goal in mind for each individual piece...

Spencer H. Clark and his wife Rosa had worked at a life's dream of assisting artists when in need and rescuing Toronto's early sculpture that would have been demolished along with the fine buildings to which they were attached. They bought a huge property on the Scarboro Bluffs, Toronto, and built what was known for years as "The Guild of All Arts," placing these early works artistically in spacious parkland. Spencer was an engineer and he made this his life's work, in later years bringing it up to date with today's sculptors, as well as creating a "York Wilson Room" in permanence with eight works (paintings and one drawing) hanging in one of the dining rooms. Spencer sold this unique cultural museum to the city

of North York under the aegis of Heritage Ontario. The name was changed to The Guild Inn and the Delta Hotel chain were brought in to manage it. This turned out to be a strictly commercial enterprise with little artistic interest and his board of directors seemed unable to safeguard this great treasure. He was in the midst of forming a group of influential cultural people at this time which included York. One of the threats was to remove the fences, put refreshment stands on the grounds opening it up to the general public. Spencer knew vandalism would soon destroy his life's work. He worked tirelessly the next few years trying to protect his dream. It finally killed him.

Sometime later Heritage Ontario removed the York Wilson paintings and put them in storage, saying the steam table was damaging them. The steam table was removed some two years ago but the paintings have not been replaced. This is contrary to the wishes of Spencer Clark and me in charge of York Wilson's interests.

1981 was my most successful year in coordinating the Symphony Art Auction. The Arcadian Court at Simpsons donated their huge gallery space and we were able to obtain 81 works of art, including two originals by the Group of Seven. We were grateful to our generous artist friends, the media and the hard working committee. York donated a \$1,000 sketch as his contribution.

On November 23, 1981, Zena Cherry mentions in the Globe and Mail:

Wilson's Work Will Hang in the Uffizi - Canadian artist York Wilson, commissioned by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence to do a self portrait, has learned his work has been accepted as part of the gallery's permanent collection... in the gallery of Self Portraits, along with those by such all-time greats as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Most recent additions to this gallery are by Siquieros of Mexico and Chagall of France...

A card from the well-known art critic Kay Kritzweiser (and many others):

Bravo! Great! and other expressions of delight to see your photograph and story in Zena's Column. I think it's a great tribute to you

— and to staunch Lela as well — to receive this international recognition when we can all proudly share it with you.

Among many other accomplishments, Kemp Kieffer started the OSA Awards; the presentation took place during a dinner, an exhibition and sale of members' works and the guest list included many corporate sponsors. This year the program reads:

Honoured Tonight With An OSA Award Are: ...Jean Paul Lemieux, Isabel McLaughlin, Robert and Signe McMichael, Henry Moore, Jack Nichols, Jack Shadbolt...

The Award was a fine, typical piece of sculpture by Gord Smith. York was pleased his Cape Breton painting brought in considerably more for the OSA than his asking price.

The Borneo Batik series of paintings by York featured Sun Umbrellas on his invitation folder to his exhibition at the Wallack Galleries in Ottawa in November.

The Canadian writer, Philip Kreiner thought this painting so beautiful that he asked permission to reproduce it on the cover of his book "Heartlands" published by the Oberon Press in 1984. York again supported the Opera with a Cape Breton sketch. The Gallery, Stratford, asked for a repeat of York's fundraising "Dream" for the TSO, he agreed and it was won by Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred P. Gregory of Stratford.

I grew up in Aurora, Ontario, a town thirty miles north of Toronto. When my old school, the Aurora Public School was turned into a museum named "Aurora and District Historical Society" in 1981, I attended a reunion of former pupils which was a fundraising event as well. I was able to donate a "York Wilson" limited edition book by Paul Duval accompanied by a lithograph, valued at \$1,000 which was happily accepted. The committee honoured me by allowing me to make the draw. Years later when I visited, their collection was so small, I immediately offered our Pre-Columbian and Primitive Art collections. I felt the Royal Ontario Museum,

though they had expressed interest, had so much since acquiring the Gardiner Museum. The Aurora Committee discussed it with the town council and decided to stay with their original idea of collecting local items as they had neither the money nor the cases to look after such a collection.

Since the Royal Canadian Academy exhibition opened in Vancouver in November we decided to go early, stopping off in Calgary and Banff, which was a marvellous experience. It was also our first trip to Vancouver and Victoria which are both interesting and beautiful cities. I think the Vancouver element thought the easterners were cheap-skates because the fund-struggling Academy had had to ask the Vancouverites to trim expenses. The annual dinner was always a dress affair after the annual meeting. They entertained us at lunch which turned out to be a pay lunch, dinner was in a Chinese restaurant with a marked-off section next to a public section from which a hot-head entered our section and started a fight with one of our Academicians in evening attire. The easterners were invited to the Heffer Gallery for refreshments for which the Academy was later billed. When the Victoria artists invited our group to Victoria that was a very different story, they couldn't have been better hosts. We simply couldn't understand the Vancouver attitude; in Toronto we had always gone to great trouble to make visiting academicians' sojourns as pleasant as possible. The same with our visits back and forth to Montreal, it was always a joy to see each other. We need much more intercourse with our western colleagues for better understanding.

The Moore Gallery in Hamilton in their pre-Christmas exhibition list an excellent group of artists in their stable: "Appel, Bellefleur, Bloore, Chadwick, Danby, Dunford, Ferron, Fournier, Jenkins, Kahane, Kurelek, Martin, Nakamura, Perehudoff, Riopelle, Rogers, Ronald, Sarafinchan, Town, Wilson."

The Winter number of the Central Hospital's publication "The Spark," 1981, devotes half the number to York being honoured by the Uffizi Gallery; the back cover is a reproduction of their mural in colour, "From the

Four Corners.” Not only is there a picture of York and myself alongside the commissioned self portrait, followed by biographical information and a short history of the Uffizi:

HONOUR BESTOWED TO ARTIST OF OUR MURAL (Following a quote from the G&M)

There is not one other city in the world that would attract all art-lovers as much as the city of Florence, Italy. The air you breathe, the stones you touch, the pavement you tread, transport you into the glorious age of the Renaissance when the Medici family, the greatest patrons of art and sciences in history, ruled over the city-state of Florence. And — once in Florence — where else would the first steps of the pilgrim lead but to the Uffizi Galleries. The “Palazzo degli Uffizi” built by Giorgio Vasari, in 1560-67, was originally intended to house public offices. The private collection of the Medicis formed the nucleus of the art gallery which eventually evolved into one of the world’s richest collection of great paintings including not only the giants of Italian art but also the best produced by other European schools. It is a priceless heirloom, and never ending source of aesthetic delight and knowledge to all lovers and students of art and cultural history.

One of the lesser known parts of the gallery, the “Vasari Corridor” that leads over palaces and bridge spanning the Arno to the Pitti Palace houses a unique collection of self-portraits of famous artists. It was founded in the 17th century by Cardinal Leopoldo de’ Medici but incorporates works from the 16th century onward. The successors to the Cardinal have continued to acquire later works, and the tradition persists even today. (Followed by a panorama of Florence and the Piazzale degli Uffizi)

We have to know at least that much really to appreciate the honor bestowed on the Canadian painter York Wilson...

York’s last trip was to the Canary Islands, January 5-April 4, 1982 where we stayed with our old friend Dr. Carlos Pinto (Head of Psychiatric Hospital in Tenerife, well-known poet and art critic). York did some exceptionally fine watercolours. Our friends there bestowed many honours on him, the artists, architects, and the Yacht Club made us honorary members, commemorating thirty years of friendship. The internationally known art critic, Eduardo Westerdahl, among others paid homage to York at the various affairs.

The Central Hospital was host to an exhibition by the Sculptors Soci-

ety of Canada, during which the two existing busts of York were borrowed and placed in front of his mural at the entrance; one was by Cleeve Horne, 1949, the other by Linda Keogh, well-known Canadian puppeteer, sculptor and actress. Linda later donated hers to the Central Hospital.

York proposed Cleeve Horne for an OSA Award because:

1. He has done more for Canadian Art than any other person I know.
2. He persuaded Imperial Oil and directed exhibitions of Canadian Art for many years.
3. He directed the purchase of two collections for the Bank of Commerce.
4. He has purchased a collection for the Ontario Hydro.
5. He chaired the RCA Collection of Murals in the MacDonald-Laurier Building.
6. He has persuaded a number of business firms that they should have collections.
7. He was an outstanding OSA President.
8. And he is a good sculptor too.

York gave one of his finest watercolours from the Canary Island trip, Puerto de Guimar to the Montreal Hadassah fundraising auction. Along with a reproduction in colour of the Central Hospital mural in “The Spark” is an excellent explanation of Central’s mural:

“From the Four Corners” ...Perhaps the most outstanding of York Wilson’s designs was the mural of Central Hospital. The purpose of this mural was to encompass the wide ranging ethnic interests of the hospital where 32 languages are spoken. He chose to do so by dividing his design into four chromatic panels representing the four corners of the world, varying from crisp cold blue of the North through the rising sun of the East, the greens of the southern tropics, and the reddish setting sun on the Western horizon. Interwoven into these chromatic areas are abstracted motifs suggesting the geology, vegetation and architecture of each area. This 11 by 12 foot mural remains as one of Wilson’s most imaginative and compelling essays in colour and design. It successfully accomplishes its mission as symbolizing the wide flung origins of the immigrants to Canada while achieving an authoritative and compelling act of pure visual experience.

Stephanie McLuhan gave her mother, Corinne and us a beautiful paint-

ing holiday in East Hampton on Long Island, New York, where she had a lovely house for the summer. It was a short walk in the sand to the sea and we enjoyed very fine evening sunsets.

The imaginative family of C.J. (Jim) Harris and his wife Mildred wanted to give Jim an unusual birthday present on his 70th and decided on a one-edition book, written by his friends. Jim was a friend of York's for more than 40 years so York did a humorous essay in the form of "Do you remember when?":

When we had a hockey game between Liberty Magazine and Ronald's Agency? When we had a stag party for Russ Mayo and we did a pseudo Liberty magazine for him? When we had a stag for Ray Avery at the Prince George Hotel, when we put his bow tie in a full bottle of beer and capped it? When we checked all his clothes at the Checkroom downstairs? (A getting even for Ray's many misdemeanours) When Vic Murray tried to stab Sammy Sales' (a maddening comedian employed for the occasion) hand with a fork?

When we had separate parties to invite C.J. Harris and Jack Kent Cooke but Lela forgot and invited them the same night and one sat in the living room and the other in the recreation room all evening?

Do you remember Drooling T. Creepalong Fondle Bum Snide? (A secretive name among the friends of someone they didn't like).

When the beautiful waitress in the coffee shop responded to Hutch's (Charles Lee Hutchings) question: "Did you make the cake with your own lily-white hands?" "No my father made it with his lily-white hands."

Jim passed away in 1995.

Another request for a 70th birthday gift came from our neighbour in Wychwood Park, the retired University of Toronto Professor, Jack Sword for his wife Connie. They could take the form of any medium, pen, brush, etc. and of course York did a very tiny painting 3" x 4", titled "Age of Wisdom."

Mrs. Ayala Zacks Abrimov, Jerusalem, (Sam and Ayala Zacks earlier had given the greatest gift of art ever given in Canada to the Art Gallery of Ontario) on learning that the AGO had done nothing in latter years to honour the work of York Wilson, writes:

I am dumbfounded about the AGO's behavior... It is so unfair that York's works are not the calling card of the Art Gallery...

Senator David Walker wrote to Wm. J. Withrow, Director of the AGO asking why a retrospective exhibition of the work of York Wilson hadn't taken place, the answer:

Thank you for your letter concerning the work of York Wilson.

You may be interested to know that I have been very familiar with this artist's work for over 25 years. There are many homes in this city where his work is enjoyed. Perhaps outside of Toronto he is not as well known...

William J. Withrow, Director,

Art Gallery of Ontario
Faint praise!

Where has Mr. Withrow been since there are over 200 York Wilson works in every major art gallery in Canada and at least 19 works in foreign museums?

In November, 1982 Edwin Stringer, a lawyer, gave York's first, large geometric painting to the Hamilton Art Gallery, Labyrinth, painted from a Paris sketch. York was pleased as it was his first work in that Gallery and an important one. Since, they have had another donation of an early work and have bought an important oval one of the Paris period, Encore de Shaka, 1963, so now he's well represented. About the same time the 14th Annual Arts Hamilton Exhibition included Lexicon of Pinks.

The international art critic, Raul Furtado, wrote a fairly complete coverage of York's work for the December Real Estate News titled "York Wilson brings art to the man in the street" with a reproduction of the Imperial Oil mural. An "Index of Ontario Artists" was published by Visual Arts Ontario. Mrs. C.B. Munson donated a York Wilson painting, from the 1952 Canary Island trip, to the Edmonton Art Gallery. York again juried the Sauza of Tequila, Mexico Art Awards which gave grants to students for further study in Mexico. The Gallery, La Collection Tudor, in Montreal asked for a few paintings and the Limited Edition book, "York Wilson" by

way of introducing him again since he hadn't shown there for many years. The Lakehead Board of Education published a brochure with an article by York on "Contemporary Canadian Art" accompanied by many reproductions. York participated in a film on Marshall McLuhan by Stephanie McLuhan. The part was of necessity small as York was now having difficulty speaking.

1983 was the 111th year of the OSA. They were busy touring a "Print" exhibition; an audio visual presentation of art to tour China and an exhibition in the OSA Gallery on Lombard Street, terminating in a fundraising silent auction, etc.

Peter Newman was preparing his deluxe book "Debrett's Peerage Limited," a Guide to the Canadian Establishment, which included York Wilson.

La Collection Tudor Art Gallery in Montreal presented a York Wilson exhibition in April, 1983. This very successful exhibition carried a wide range of media and among several good reviews was an excellent one in the magazine "Vie des Arts" by Jean-Pierre Duquette, (in part):

...has literally toured the world, staying some years in Paris, then New York, finally to see self-portrait commissioned by the Uffizi, where it will represent him in the famous Corridor of Vasari reserved for certain artists' self-portraits from all periods... 3-4 studies of nudes... reveal loveable mastership... capturing something free and atmospheric, in appearance may look easy, but comes from discipline and long experience... acrylics have something in common, their construction seems to follow a cutting out/collage... the balance of masses always harmonious... a personal vision, always alert and attentive...

Central Hospital did it again, they mounted a fine exhibition of "Fibre Art," York was included with two tapestries, one of which sold to the artist, Isabel McLaughlin for \$18,000. This caused so much excitement that Dr. Paul Reikai himself phoned to tell York. The exhibition toured to the Cambridge Public Library and Arts Centre in Cambridge, Ontario. In March 1984 to celebrate Toronto's 150th and Ontario 200th anniversary, "Fibre

Art '83" was opened at the St. Lawrence Art Centre by Toronto's one time "perfect little Mayor" David Crombie.

On July 13, 1983, York and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary at the unique Guild of All Arts, Scarborough, which was created by our dearest friend, Spencer Clark, who gave a few opening remarks (in part):

...As many of you know, Virginia Kieran has been following in her father's footsteps in a creative and fruitful career of her own. With the deep affection of a devoted daughter, Virginia has done something special for this occasion. She has searched and gathered 51 different flowers, one to mark each of the anniversaries and one more to mark the day they were married... In the field of portraiture York has done another remarkable work, uniquely his, and it is here today for its premier showing. It is of Scott Symons, a rare and intense individual, controversial yes, but driven and possessed by deep inner springs. York has captured the spiritual depths of that rare person. I hope you will all look carefully at this work for it will have an important destiny and record York's exceptional talent...

Toronto Star: Artist York Wilson, 76, and his wife, Lela, held a reception for 100 guests and a dinner party for 50 at The Guild Inn this week to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary... A highlight was an exhibit of 38 paintings from York's private collection hung specially for the celebration... And in honor of the occasion, the Coral Room of The Guild Inn was officially changed to the York Wilson Room, where a permanent collection of the artist's works from different periods are on display... Guests came from Jerusalem, Belgium, France, San Francisco and Mexico, as well as Toronto and included an international Who's Who...

A plaque was installed over the door, "YORK WILSON ROOM," at the side of the door a photograph and another plaque with a short biography. This was such a happy occasion for us. I had been anxious because of York's fragile state of health, but he persisted in wanting to see all his friends. Maybe he had a premonition that it would be the last time! Corinne McLuhan was our constant companion as she had been invited to spend a week at the Guild with us.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation Firestone Art Collection was toured

throughout Europe with much acclaim. The University of Saskatchewan requested permission to use bibliography material in French from recent Montreal exhibition along with material from France related to York's exhibitions in order to compare current usage. The book "Toronto In Art, 150 Years Through Artists' Eyes" - Toronto's official sesquicentennial, by Edith Firth was published and presented by Mayor Eggleston and the author at a reception at the City Hall. York's Serenaders 1944 represent him.

A major retrospective (which included many works from the artist's private collection) at the Moore Gallery in Hamilton followed in October, 1983. This important exhibition was covered nationally by the Press and I quote parts:

"AUTHENTIC ART PERSONALITY" "There are as many styles as there are artists endowed with an authentic personality." Michel Seuphor, France ...The oils represent the years from 1945 up to the present, tracing his evolution from earth-toned palette and figurative studies to the style of lyrical abstraction for which he has become so well-known... He spent a lot of time (in the mid-'40's) talking with Varley who said then that he thought York was the most promising young painter in Canada... York Wilson is and always was an individualist, a characteristic shared by Varley, Jack Bush (with whom he shared a two-man exhibition in 1944) and every great painter of the modern world. Fads in art did not deter him...

Lois Crawford

He must be at or near the top of the list when it comes to international awards, honors, exhibits and inclusion in public collections, so he looks back on a remarkable history of a productive and disciplined artist. The stunning visual effect of the show at the Moore Gallery simply makes the history convincing... One of the most exciting, Endymion should establish him as a fine abstract painter anywhere, with its translucent planes and floating matter, light as air itself, and King Christophe, a more moody work of close-knit design, and French Town, are first class too. All are from the 1960's, when he spent time in France...
Inglis

But with the 50's, Wilson made the change to abstraction, a move which isolated him from his immediate contemporaries but proved central to his future; all his work from that time on has been abstract... Painters Eleven had one more candidate for membership, York

Wilson... Each of York Wilson's highly personal paintings has the freshness of a new experiment. J o a n Murray.

What comes through in the high-ceilinged spaces of this beautiful gallery is a slow unfolding of a painter's subconscious creativity. This one moves to the measured tread of an artist unaffected by the bandwagons and isms which eddied around him... One of the most powerful paintings... is a portrait of Scott Symons, the Toronto author and art historian... He wanted to paint the spiritual color of a person, without regard for the sitter's likeness... York painted in a sort of trance, for two hours in a white-hot heat. He feels he caught many facets of Scott's character, but he was as surprised as anyone that it also turned out to be an exact likeness... K a y Kritzwiser.

The Arts and Letters Club "Newsletter," October, 1983:

Archie Arbuckle paid tribute to York Wilson for insisting on juried shows in recent years, a professional approach that keeps every artist on his toes.

Despite the handicap of poor health, York Wilson has been particularly busy lately. Early in the summer an interesting solo exhibition was held in Montreal. Then on July 13 he and his wife Lela celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at The Guild of All Arts when The York Wilson Room, resplendent with his paintings, was dedicated by Spencer Clark with a special plaque. A reception and dinner followed at which warm greetings were conveyed by Pauline McGibbon, Cleeve Horne, Hugh Walker, Herman Voaden, and others.

And a retrospective exhibition of York's was held in Hamilton at the Moore Gallery... Work by York now appears in over 60 public collections, and in numerous private collections across three continents. Fourteen of his murals exist in Toronto, Ottawa, Timmins, Thunder Bay and Montreal, and he has had exhibitions in the United States, Spain, France, England, Mexico, Switzerland, Italy, India and Canada...

The Italian Academy published an encyclopedia in 1983, titled "Contemporary Personalities" with a photo and biography of York Wilson.

The OSA honoured York with an Art Award and dinner November 3, 1983. He wasn't well enough to be there to accept the Award (a striking piece of bronze sculpture by the talented sculptor, Gord Smith) and I ac-

cepted it for him. The Citation reads:

THE OSA AWARD

The OSA Award was founded in 1980 for the purpose of honouring Canadians who have made a distinguished contribution to the vitality and stature of the visual arts in Canada either as artists working in a wide range of disciplines or as patrons of the arts whose vision and support had been significant for the cultural heritage of this country.

Throughout its one hundred and eleven years the Ontario Society of Artists has been an influential force in the artistic life not only of Ontario but far beyond the borders of the Province. The establishment of art galleries, teaching institutions and artists' groups and participation in a variety of heritage projects all bear witness to the OSA's lively awareness of its responsibilities. Over the years many of Canada's most illustrious artists have been members of the Society.

We invite you to join with us tonight in honouring three outstanding Canadians each of whom has contributed substantially to the vigour and reputation of our national art. (Yvonne McKague Houser - Mrs. Samuel Bronfman - York Wilson)

1983 was a noteworthy year for York Wilson; many honours came his way. It was fortunate indeed as he passed away within four months!

1983

Our long friendship with Marshall McLuhan:

One of York's and my greatest pleasures in life has been our long friendship with Marshall and Corinne McLuhan.

We brought them to their lovely home in Wychwood Park, close by our own, and this friendship flourished through the years. I must let York describe it in his own words:

(By York Wilson for an issue on McLuhan of the Antigonish Review) 1983 (unpublished).

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

(actual signature)

Marshall McLuhan's carefully considered opinions were well-tested through collaboration with various friends and colleagues, usually experts in their field. On matters related to "art," he often appeared at my studio to discuss one aspect or another. For instance, when invited to speak on "SPACE" to an International Symposium

on Art to be held in Ottawa, we discussed the various kinds of space in painting: positive, negative, equivocal, musical, aerial, etc. The conversation drifted into "what constitutes art." Sometimes something that has become rare, becomes a "collectible," such as a Barnum & Bailey poster. No one saved them. Being of little value, they were tossed in the garbage; therefore few survived. Being rare, their value increased and in the broad sense became "art." Therefore "art is garbage." Conversations with Marshall moved quickly; one had to be on one's toes, or not understand the conclusion. A few days later headlines appeared in the papers "MARSHALL MCLUHAN SAYS ART IS GARBAGE." It was necessary to know Marshall, or at least how his mind worked, in order to understand him, this being only a simple example.

There is a great need for instruction in understanding Marshall McLuhan, one of the great minds of our time. He has made an incalculable contribution, and unfortunately is little understood, as well as being ignorantly dismissed by so many of his own countrymen.

Marshall was a great punster. Often one groaned at his puns, but soon acquired the habit of saving one-liners for him; eg., "Art consists of drawing the line somewhere," "The Trouble with treating people as your equal, they begin to think they are," "The Upper Crust are only crumbs held together by dough." Graffiti seen on a wash-room wall: "The Meek don't want it." One of his own, for my retrospective exhibition catalogue: "A Retrospective is like looking in the rear-vision mirror" - Mine, same catalogue, "A Retrospective is like bringing coals to Newcastle."

When distant communication by satellite came into being, Marshall was invited to send the first message over "TELSTAR." He appeared at my door to discuss what he should say. He said the first message sent on Morse code was "WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT"... He suggested he might add to that. I said, "That was what Morse said, why not a McLuhan phrase, "THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE?" He agreed and said, he could add such and such. I said, "If you do I'll sue you" which was really a plea to leave it alone, it was so apropos.

Another instance of his modesty was when he wrote a foreword for my book by Paul Duval. He arrived with the manuscript to see if it were satisfactory and, indeed it was but he hadn't signed it. When I suggested that he sign it, he looked confused and said, "What will I sign it?" I said, "Your name of course." He then asked if he could have a sheet of paper to practise. He tried half a dozen versions of his name (all printed) and gave me a choice; apparently he had always printed his signature. He was like a little boy, and so were the signatures. I found this interesting, a man so renowned wondering how to sign his signature, whether the letters should have serifs or not. The

title to this essay is one of those signatures.

Like myself, Marshall often worked during the evening, then went for a walk with his wife Corinne before retiring, saying, "It was good for Corinne's legs." She had been advised to walk regularly for the good of her circulation. They would appear at our door mid-evening, come in and have a little conversation over a cup of hot cocoa, which he loved. Sometimes if it were at their house, then they would walk us home, and if we still wished to talk, we would walk them back. Usually this went on for three or four rounds for it was beautiful and quiet in Wychwood Park at that time of night. We had built in the Park some 27 years before and Marshall was conscious of this aspect, there was no traffic really. When he was awarded the Schweitzer Chair for a year at Fordham University, he developed a tumour under his brain. He had a successful operation in New York, which left him sensitive to noise for some time. One day he phoned from New York to see if I could find them a house in the Park, for their return. Rarely was there a house for sale, but good luck was with us and one that was perfect became available through a chance conversation. That is where the McLuhan family has lived ever since.

Often Marshall would invite us to look at a television program with them. We would go down to their furnace room, which was also their TV room, probably set up there because they had six children. The furnace was a small up-to-date one, gaily painted in primary colours, a different colour for each pipe. It had quite a presence; the room was warm and comfortable, a few easy chairs, a large bean chair, a challenge to aging bones; a sofa at the back behind the viewers where Marshall lounged. The TV fitted into a small niche, on a pedestal for some strange reason, and any other space had surplus pieces of stored, wrapped furniture - all in all a nice cosy spot for kids. But now the "kids" were seldom there, away, immersed in their own lives, scattered in New York, London, Paris, Los Angeles, Dallas, etc. Now-a-days the grown-up "kids" might be the Claude Bissels, then President of Toronto University, visiting professors, neighbours, or even clergy. Marshall would get us seated, turn on the program, then retreat to the rear, gradually easing down to a prone position, falling asleep, at least closing his eyes, but would be upright the moment the program was over, hence seldom caught napping. This reminds me of the time they invited us to see a movie, the Woody Allen picture in which Marshall had a walk-on part. On the way home, I asked him what he thought of the picture. He said, "I don't know, I was asleep." "You mean you didn't see the part where you appeared?" He said, "Oh yes, I waited for that, then went to sleep." I think he usually knew what was going on through osmosis, during light napping, but was intelligent enough to save his energy for things that mattered. During a visit with us in Mexico, they stopped over in Mexico City en

route, as he was to deliver a lecture there to students of the University. The audience listened so attentively, one could hear a “pun” drop, as evidenced later by the lively question-and-answer period. Finally it had to be broken up as VIP’s and the press were awaiting him at a reception and dinner given in his honour. The following day they came to us in San Miguel, a 4-hour drive from Mexico City.

The following morning he had me doing “TETRADS” with him, (tetra, the Greek word meaning four, groups of four). He had in mind our collaborating on a book. I soon caught on to the idea, and we spent many hilarious hours together on our roof-garden patio, working out various combinations of ‘four,’ based on the premise of “amplifying,” “obsolescing,” “retrieving,” and “reversing”; my illustrating them as the ideas evolved. A few examples are shown here, two are illustrated. “CAMERA” amplifies the snapshot, enhances aggression; obsolesces privacy, cult of the private; retrieves past as present (family album), outside world, big game hunter, human zoo; reverses into public domain, cinema, new public domain. “CLOCK” (Time) amplifies work (assembly line); obsolesces leisure (clock watcher); as art from (Bayeux Tapestry); reverses into eternal present (1066 And All That). “ELEVATOR” amplifies mine-shaft; obsolesces stairs and ladders; retrieves metals and buried treasure in the earth, the cave-man reappears; reverses into highrise, skyscraper. “CIGARETTE” enhances calm and poise, mask, a put-on; obsolesces awkwardness, loneliness; retrieves ritual group security (one of the boys); reverses into nervousness, addiction, jitters. “SLANG” enhances perception of contemporary; obsolesces conventional vagueness; retrieves unconventional feelings (more basic feelings, primal); reverses to cliché through repetition. “HAT” (phallic) enhances self importance, masculinity; obsolesces private person; retrieves corporate role; reverses to group which becomes comic. “PURSE” (vaginal) enhances self reliance; obsolesces pockets; retrieves miscellany (cornucopia); reverses into shopping bag, suitcase, travel bag. We made many others in quick pencil jottings as we talked. Unfortunately I have a one-track mind “painting,” and the book was never done.

Through the Press, it was known that Marshall was in Mexico. The four of us were invited to a banquet for the new Governor of the State of Guanajuato. At the Reception prior to the dinner, we were warmly welcomed into the Governor’s party, (his wife, a former Miss Universe, spoke English). It was relaxed and friendly, and when we went to dinner the Governor walked in with his arm around my shoulders and being a little flustered trying to speak Spanish, wishing to be equally friendly I said to him “Habla Español?” (Do you speak Spanish?); he replied good humouredly, “Si, un poco” (A little). Realizing my error, as I had meant “English,” I was very embarrassed. The McLuhans and ourselves were seated with the Governor at the Head

Table, and during the after-dinner speeches, Marshall was warmly welcomed and invited to speak, which he did, in English. Suddenly the Press surrounded my wife Lela, for instant translation, plus a quick course on Marshall McLuhan. The following day the Governor invited us, as his guests, to visit his city, Guanajuato, 60 miles distant. Limousines with the Mayor, drivers and guides arrived at our door in San Miguel at 8 a.m. and off we went. They wine and dined us royally, presented us with dedicated plaques, beautifully illustrated books of the State of Guanajuato. Of course the McLuhans were also lionized in San Miguel. The Culture Group who arranged weekly lectures at Belles Artes (Fine Arts Museum) prevailed upon Marshall to speak, but were unable to persuade him. Not only was this trip a rare rest for him, but Corinne said it was his one and only vacation. They are well remembered as many were able to have discussions with Marshall and Corinne at private dinner parties.

When Marshall was asked to advise a Royal Commission on Education in Canada, one Commissioner asked, "Could anything be done to discourage children from reading comic books?" "That's easy," said Marshall, "Make them compulsory... and subject to examinations."

When the Dutch painter Karel Appel attended a reception given by Rothmans of Pall Mall in his honour at Stratford during the Shakespeare Festival, his one request was that he meet Marshall McLuhan. I was corralled on arrival to arrange this and phoned Toronto from the Rothman Art Gallery there, inviting them both to my house the following day. Karel had in mind doing a book with Marshall or having him write a foreword to a book on his work. It all worked out well and a book with a foreword by Marshall was published in due course.

One of the ironies of it all is that Marshall McLuhan is appreciated far more outside Canada. One of the first questions asked by a Japanese sculptor, newly arrived in New York, was did I know the work of Marshall McLuhan, and he told me that Marshall is highly regarded in Japan.

One of the many misconceptions here is that Marshall was leading the young in a very destructive and demoralizing course. A close friend, an Order of Canada recipient, once angrily shouted at me, "Would you speak to your friend Marshall McLuhan and point out the harm he is doing to our young people?" "On the contrary," I replied, "the quotes you mention are out of context and are in no way related to his thinking or teaching. He is simply reporting on what is happening in our era, not endorsing it, in the hope of wakening people up." Marshall is a very religious man, with a large family and is just as concerned as the next parent about what is happening; the effect of indiscriminate television programs, movies, books, lack of

parental guidance and setting of good examples, lower the standards. Marshal is a “seer” and knows where the signs are leading.

During his last illness, when he was unable to speak, read or write, he appeared at my door one day, all smiles, both hands extended, offering me a little painting he had done for my birthday, a few brightly coloured lines. His wife, Corinne, had put a row of dots to show where he was to put his “X,” and she signed his name. This is one of my treasures. Y o r k
Wilson

On February 10, 1984 at 4 a.m. in the Toronto General Hospital York Wilson quietly passed away; he had not been well for some time. Over 250 letters of condolence from many countries; obituaries by the Press; remembrance essays by the various art societies, the Arts and Letters Club, the Central Hospital appeared attesting to the fact that this brilliant, kind gentle man was well loved.

A small part of York’s ashes were sprinkled in Dr. Carlos Pinto Grote’s garden in Tenerife, and a ceremony took place, performed by his many friends there, followed by humorous remembrances in the Press commemorating over 30 years of friendship.

Since 13 had always been our lucky number, I planned to sprinkle York’s ashes in 13 favourite countries. So far, Leon Katz took some to Israel, put them in the soil when he planted a tree in the Peace Forest in remembrance of York. Corinne McLuhan tossed some on the waves in the Pacific Ocean in California, hoping they would touch many shores with thoughts of peace. Leonard Brooks sprinkled some under a tree in his garden, near his studio in Mexico, with a little ceremony by York’s friends. I sprinkled some with a prayer from the Rialto Bridge in Venice and in his beloved studio-home garden in Wychwood Park, Toronto. Luc Peire sprinkled some in his garden in Paris. I still have seven more countries for York was truly a world citizen.

Before York’s death, he said, “What pleases me most is to have my work in the Uffizi Gallery.” What he didn’t know was that they wrote later

for his book “York Wilson” by Paul Duval and the accompanying lithograph. He also knew that he had been awarded the “Statue of Victory” “Personality of the Year 1984” by the Centre of Study and Research of the Nation in Italy. “It is in acknowledgement of cultural and professional zeal shown in your field of activity, and of your important contribution to the improvement of present-day society.”

A letter from Scott Symons in Morocco:

Poste restante, Bureau de poste, Essaouira, Morocco — 27
March, 1984

My dear Lele —

So he’s gone. Charles Taylor has sent me the newspaper clippings announcing dear York’s death even as they belatedly celebrate his life and work.

Of course I grieve with you!

Jean Cocteau used to say that there is only one death... that of other people! I understand that. And York’s death is for me a hurt. He did so much to encourage and abet me in crucial years. And his wit and humour (and sound common sense) helped to prop me up in bad days — as you well know.

And of course, now, I am doubly glad I wrote him the letter I did last Summer. Yes, I know it must have given York joy, Lele.

But if I certainly feel the hurt of York’s death, I also feel almost a sense of relief — because York suffered in a prolonged way in those final months. This I know from various friends, including Leonard and Reva Brooks.

York confronted for many weeks the spectre of oncoming death. He must have known there was little likelihood of any enjoyable reprieve, given the state of his health.

So for him it is a mercy. And that is what counts, isn’t it!

There is, Lele, the final irony of all the newspaper accolades, given after his passing. Yes — but by and large Canadian art critics (with some distinguished exceptions) did precious little for York during his life! Indeed, many critics seemed almost to overlook York, studiously ignoring him, and his ever-evolving art. And doing so in favour of trendy younger artists whose work will not last, except as visual sociological data of a time and place.

That must have hurt York, inside himself, often. And often I wished I could do something about this. As, for example, I did at TVO, for Fred Powell. But time fled...

The fact remains, that York as a person, and as an artist, is larger than any of the media and its variable critics. And his work will stand, and his reputation will grow! He knew this; and he deserved to have the confidence of knowing it.

But you know, Lele, it is York's personality that remains with me as a standard. Ebullient, witty and witful, horrendously irrepressible... and loyal! He was a fighter, a scrapper... and a civilized host. He combined many opposites, well!

He could be termagant, yes, as you know better than any of us, dear Lele. But if and when termagant, it was always on the side of the angels — sometimes even despite York.

Yes, I have the wedding anniversary photograph of you and York hanging here in my studio beside me — framed and glassed, so it will endure.

When I return to Toronto in some few months I shall want to phone you and see you. We have memories to share (precious ones, and deep ones) — and York lies at the core of these memories.

And we must discuss the matter of his papers, letters, and mementos. His art will live, of course. But York as York must also live — in a book, in essays, in interviews about him.

Whatever you decide to do to this end, you already know you can count on my help, Lele.

My love to you now, and my hand on your shoulder as a longtime friend.

Scott Symons

A letter from Graeme Wilson, who was currently in Brunei:

Your sad letter reached me here today and, though Mac had earlier told me of York's death, I now at last am able to settle down and send you all my heart's condolences.

I know from your earlier letters, that in a very real sense, York's dying was a release and that he himself was content to go. I realize, too, that York had grown to see his fantastic personal contribution to Western art as something like a failure. In that, he was quite and entirely mistaken. I do not know all the ins and outs of his struggles with competitors and denigrators; only that York was too fine a man to match muck with muck, and too sensitive a man to believe in himself with the same total commitment as I, for one, believe in him and in the imperishable worth of his life-work.

It's hard to say that something is to be valued even more than the life-work of a great artist; but I do value York as a man more highly than his astonishing creations. He was, in the most complete sense, a giver of life. Just to have chatted with him for a quarter-hour, made a whole week lively. And his sense of fun, perhaps more ex-

actly, his sense of frolic remains, in my experience, unsurpassed.

As you know, I loved him dearly and, having seen so little of him over, the last few years, I still feel that, just over there, "old Cocker," will be up to his larks again. In that sense York has, to me, always been, and still is, immortal. Yet most of all I'll miss knowing that, at any time, I'll be able to see, through his painter's eye, his truth of the world as he saw it. For he saw, and saw truly, what anyone can see once York had shown him how to look. And that's the mark not just of a master-painter, but of a master spirit. This little verse says a little of what I feel —

My friend is dead. His death has blinded me,
Not merely with the tears such deaths compel
But with the losing of a way to see.

For York could show, and no man else as well,
A particular, truth of colourings and shape
Not grasped by any other, heart or mind.

Tears blind me with their temporary escape,
But my lost York-sight no man can unblind.

END