

Auction house sells historic collection of Canadian fighter pilot turned art dealer

Old-school collector Torben Kristiansen bought pieces and kept them for himself

KATE TAYLOR

When Vancouver art dealer Torben Kristiansen died at the age of 92 last July, he left behind a trove of Canadian paintings. Squirrelled away in the gallery he established in the 1960s, Kristiansen had kept two important abstractions by Lawren Harris, several landscapes by Emily Carr and an early Jean-Paul Riopelle estimated to be worth \$2.5-million to \$3.5-million.

Kristiansen, a former fighter pilot and flight attendant, was a dealer of the old-school variety, one who bought inventory and kept it, becoming a collector himself in the process.

"He was never in a hurry to sell a painting," said Robert Heffel, whose auction house is offering Kristiansen's collection at a Toronto sale Thursday. For example, Kristiansen bought the two Harris paintings of 1946 and 1950, *Mountain Experience* and *Migratory Flight*, from the artist's estate after his death in 1970 and kept them ever since.

"He was ahead of the curve in knowing the value of Lawren Harris abstracts," Heffel said, although the collection also includes two more conventional Harris mountain landscapes from the 1920s as well as works by Tom Thomson and Group of Seven members Arthur Lismer, Franklin Carmichael and A.Y. Jackson. Kristiansen liked to buy specific artists in depth, especially British Columbia artists such as Carr, B.C. Binning, represented in the sale by two geometric renditions of ships, and the 1960s landscape painter E. J. Hughes.

An immigrant to Vancouver,



A piece of artwork known as *Mountain Experience* by Lawren Harris is one of many pieces Torben Kristiansen purchased throughout his time collecting art. Kristiansen purchased this and *Migratory Flight* from Harris's estate after his death in 1970.

Kristiansen came by this passion for Canadian art in a roundabout way: Born in Denmark, he started his career in the Royal Danish Air Force after the Second World War. He was trained to fly a P-51 Mustang fighter as part of a NATO exchange with the U.S. Air Force and is credited with flying it upside-down along the main street of his hometown to silence a doubting buddy.

He didn't stick with piloting, however: Instead he joined Scandinavian Airlines as a flight attendant and purser before he moved to CP Air in 1956 and came to Canada. He began using his



Kristiansen descends the boarding steps of an SAS commercial airplane. Kristiansen, who was described as charismatic and highly confident in his own opinions about art, bought the Art Emporium in Vancouver and established his own art gallery in 1960.

flights from Europe to Vancouver to import paintings that he would resell, offering Canadians a taste of international art.

In 1960, he bought the Art Emporium, a Robson Street art gallery and framing shop. Established in 1897, it could claim to be the oldest art gallery in Vancouver. Under Kristiansen it moved to the city's gallery row on Granville Street and concentrated increasingly on blue-chip Canadian art, while the art dealer also bought and sold real estate.

"Once he opened a gallery in Vancouver, he became passionate about Canadian art, the allure

of Canadian art," Heffel said. "Torben had a good eye and he backed it: He'd explain why one painting was better than another." Described as charismatic and highly confident in his own opinions about art, Kristiansen was still operating the Art Emporium when he died. But increasingly, he had become a collector. He had amassed a group of paintings estimated to be worth between \$6.4-million and \$9-million, which his estate — three times married he leaves his widow, Patricia, four children and two stepchildren — is now dispersing.

Kristiansen had followed a pattern established by a previous generation of art dealers who bought and held art, often betting on their own tastes to make canny investments such as his embrace of the Harris abstractions before they became recognized or his purchases of Carr before her prices went up. His Canadian predecessors would include the Toronto art dealer Blair Laing and the Montreal dealer Max Stern but he was several decades younger, one of the last of a breed.

"Whenever he had funds, he loved buying art," Heffel said.

Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping preach for Neil Young's tour

BRAD WHEELER



Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping, the opening act for Neil Young and Crazy Horse's Love Earth Tour, perform on stage. The group has been described as a "bizarre opening act" for Young. BUCKY BALDWIN

Opening up for Neil Young and Crazy Horse, earlier this week, Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping literally preached to the choir. The New York-based anti-consumerists and climate-change crusaders have significantly pared down their normal 30-plus size while travelling North America on Young's eco-activist Love Earth Tour. As such, there were familiar faces in the crowd at its two hometown shows at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens.

"Our choir members who couldn't come on the road with us were in the audience in good numbers," says Reverend Billy, an outlandish, non-ordained performance artist whose real name is Bill Talen. "As well, New York is a liberal city, in agreement with the Love Earth theme."

On the other hand, the Church was booed in Atlanta. The group had shouted "Stop Cop City," in reference to the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, a controversial instructional campus for police under construction. Apparently, Cop City (as it is known among its opponents) had some support among the crowd.

"I wasn't surprised to get booted," says Savitri D., who is Talen's wife and the group's director. "Law enforcement has reach in many communities, and I'm sure there was many police present at that show."

The two are speaking from their New York home via video conference. The tour, Young's first with his long-time on-and-off band in a decade, plays Toronto's Budweiser Stage on Monday, with a string of seven more Canadian dates in July. It's a tough gig being an unknown opening act. The bulk of the audience is there for the headliners, not the support artists. Engagement isn't easy.

On the Love Earth Tour, Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping aren't even billed. They show up on stage at 7:30 or so and start their unusual, evangelistic musical activism. In a review of the tour's concert last week in Alabama, AL.com's Matt Wake described them as a "bizarre opening act."

Talen calls it hard work: "We walk out on stage, and find the audience staring at us, like a stare down."

But when they play a plaintive song such as *The Great Outdoors*, the more attentive members of the crowd will understand what is happening. The song asks "What did you do to the great outdoors and to our children's children — why and what for?" The best fans of Young will know he raised a similar question on the 2014 environmentalist song *Who's Gonna Stand Up?*, and that he has been writing and recording such material for more than 50 years, starting with *After the Gold Rush* in 1970 and *Vampire Blues* — "I'm a vampire, babe, suckin' blood from the earth" — in 1974.

Reverend Billy & the Church's association with Young and his actress-wife Daryl Hannah goes back more than a decade. E-mail correspondence between them began around the time of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement. Hannah had been arrested in 2009 in West Virginia for protesting mountaintop removal mining. The Church has a song called *Mountain Top*.

They are united in what Talen calls the "long struggle against the toxins of the Monsanto Company." Young and the group the Promise of the Real released the 2015 album *The Monsanto Years* in protest against the mega agricultural corporation.

And they bond over anti-con-

sumerism. On Young's website the Toronto venue for the tour is listed as "Sponsored By Nobody Stage," instead of its proper name, Budweiser Stage. Clearly, this Bud is not for Young.

There are many variables when it comes to pairing headliners with opening acts: box-office synergy, shared record companies or management, geographical concerns, musical compatibility. None of those things had anything to do with this tour bill.

"An ecocide energy is absolutely at hand," says Talen, who started protesting in character as the pompadour preacher in Times Square in 1998. "It's called Love Earth Tour — that's the name of the tour. We were chosen because that's our message, and it has been for years."

Playing to unresponsive audiences is nothing new for the Church, which has played bank lobbies and police lines. "We spend a lot of time in unasked-for places," says Savitri D. Their performances have not been tailored for a classic rock audience, except for a short 30-minute set. "The only limitation we have," she says, "is time."

As it happens, running out of time is exactly what the tour's message is all about.

July 8, Budweiser Stage, Toronto; July 11, Ottawa Bluesfest; July 13, Rock the Park, London, Ont.; July 17, Blue Cross Park, Winnipeg; July 20, For Calgary; July 22-23, Deer Lake Park, Burnaby, B.C.

AN ANNUAL RICH LIST SAYS PAUL MCCARTNEY IS BRITAIN'S FIRST BILLIONAIRE MUSICIAN

LONDON Sir Paul McCartney is a billionaire Beatle. According to figures released Friday, the former member of the Fab Four is the first British musician to be worth £1-billion (\$1.73-billion).

The annual Sunday Times Rich List calculated that the wealth of the 81-year-old musician and his wife, Nancy Shevell, had grown by £50-million since last year thanks to McCartney's 2023 Got Back tour, the rising value of his back catalogue and Beyoncé's cover of The Beatles' *Blackbird* on her *Cowboy Carter* album.

A "final" Beatles song, *Now and Then*, was also released in November and topped music charts in the U.S., Britain and other countries. Surviving Beatles McCartney and Ringo Starr completed a demo track recorded in 1977 by the late John Lennon, adding in guitar by George Harrison, who died in 2001.

The newspaper estimated £50-million of the couple's wealth is owing to Shevell, daughter of the late U.S. trucking tycoon Mike Shevell.

McCartney ranked 165th overall on the newspaper's respected and widely perused list of the U.K.'s 350 richest people. Top spot went to Gopi Hinduja and his family, who own the banking, media and entertainment conglomerate Hinduja Group and are worth an estimated £37-billion.

Other entertainment figures on the list include *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling, whose fortune is estimated at £945-million, and singer Sir Elton John, estimated to be worth £470-million.

King Charles ranked 258th with an estimated wealth of £610-million. The King's fortune includes the large inherited private estates of Sandringham in England and Balmoral in Scotland. The total does not include items that are held in trust by the monarch for the nation, such as the Crown Jewels. ASSOCIATED PRESS

DRAKE LEADS THE 2024 BET AWARDS NOMINATIONS WITH 7, FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY NICKI MINAJ

Drake is the leading nominee for next month's BET Awards, followed closely by Nicki Minaj.

The Canadian rapper received seven nominations, including an album of the year nod for his eighth studio album, *For All the Dogs*. One of the awards he's up for is the music video for *First Person Shooter*, his collaboration with J. Cole that may have been the catalyst for his recent beef with rapper Kendrick Lamar.

Minaj received six nominations, including for album of the year for her highly anticipated *Pink Friday 2* release. Two of her nominations were for her song with Ice Spice, *Barbie World*, part of the blockbuster *Barbie* soundtrack. Beyoncé, received four nominations, including for best female R&B/pop artist as well as recognition for two *Cowboy Carter* tracks, *Texas Hold 'Em* and *16 Carriages*.

Drake's *Rich Baby Daddy*, which features SZA and Sexy Red, is competing for the best collaboration and two other awards.

Super Bowl headliner Usher is among the artists vying for four awards, along with 21 Savage, Megan Thee Stallion, Doja Cat and Tyla, who won the inaugural best African music performance honour at the Grammy Awards.

The film nominees this year are: *American Fiction*; *Bob Marley: One Love*; *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé*; *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*; *The Book of Clarence*; *The Color Purple*; *The Equalizer 3* and *The Little Mermaid*.

Simone Biles, Naomi Asaka, Steph Curry, LeBron James and Patrick Mahomes are among the sports stars competing for awards. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Canadaland defamation case goes to trial

At the heart of the dispute are comments made during an episode of the podcast that referenced a 1996 article about the WE Organization

PAOLA LORIGGIO

A defamation lawsuit filed by the mother of Marc and Craig Kielburger against the Canadaland podcast and its host will head to trial after an Ontario court rejected an application to have it thrown out, finding there is reason to believe the claim has "substantial merit."

Canadaland, its host Jesse Brown and others involved in the podcast had sought to have the lawsuit — which centres on an August, 2021, episode about the Kielburger-founded WE Organization — dismissed under legislation meant to protect people from litigation intended to silence critics or public debate.

In a ruling released earlier this month, an Ontario Superior Court judge dismissed the lawsuit against Isabel Vincent, a reporter who was a guest on the episode, but ruled it should proceed against Mr. Brown and Canadaland.

The ruling by Justice Edward Morgan found there is no reason to believe Mr. Brown and Canadaland have "any valid defence," noting the episode omitted key information in a way that undermined its objectivity and Mr. Brown showed a "callous disregard" for Theresa Kielburger's reputation in an affidavit.

At the heart of the dispute are comments made during an episode of the podcast that referenced a 1996 article about the WE Organization, then called Free the Children, according to the ruling.

The article was written by Ms. Vincent and contained an allegation about the handling of funds by Theresa Kielburger on behalf of the organization.

The piece, published in the magazine *Saturday Night*, said \$150,000 pledged by the Ontario Federation of Labour in 1995 had been deposited in the family's bank account. Ms. Kielburger was interviewed ahead of publication and said she did not handle the money for Free the Children, nor did she or her family have access to the funds, but that wasn't included in the story, the court document says. As well, both the family's accountant and the OFL's president wrote to the magazine to refute the allegation and explain where the mon-

ey was deposited after the article was published.

A defamation suit was filed with Craig Kielburger, not his mother, as the plaintiff. It ended in a settlement of close to \$320,000 before going to trial.

In 2021, Canadaland revisited the issue, with the allegation "repeated as a theme" for the episode titled *The White Saviors*, the ruling says. The information from the accountant and the OFL was not included, nor was Theresa Kielburger contacted for comment, the document says.

Mr. Brown and Canadaland never gave Ms. Kielburger a chance to refute the allegation that she deposited large sums of money into the family's personal bank account, the judge wrote. Mr. Brown told the court it did not seem relevant to ask her to respond given that she was not a party to the earlier lawsuit, the document says.

"Whether the plaintiff was a party to the earlier action, however, is obviously not the issue; the point is that a statement about the plaintiff has to be put to the plaintiff so that she can respond," the judge said.

The judge specifically pointed to Mr. Brown's sworn affidavit, in which the podcast host said: "[W]e did not seek comment [from the plaintiff] for the same reason why I didn't seek comment from my own mother; neither of them were involved."

The statement implies that, in Mr. Brown's eyes, "the plaintiff's feelings are worth nothing," Justice Morgan wrote.

"The fact that he was speaking about the plaintiff, and imposing personal pain on the plaintiff by repeating an allegation about her that he was aware had been seriously contested, if not established as entirely false, was seen by him as irrelevant," he said.

"The cynicism of Brown's explanation not only accentuates the defamatory sting of his words, but could be considered high handed and oppressive."

Ms. Kielburger's testimony about the emotional impact of the allegation, meanwhile, was "credible and impactful," the judge said.

In assessing whether Mr. Brown and Canadaland had done their due diligence in trying to verify the allegation, the judge



Craig, left, and Marc Kielburger attend WE Day California in Inglewood, Calif., in 2019. An Ontario judge has rejected a bid to throw out a defamation suit filed by their mother, Theresa Kielburger, against the Canadaland podcast and its host Jesse Brown. JESSE GRANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR WE DAY

noted there was no mention of the letters the accountant and the OFL's president wrote to Saturday Night.

"For Canadaland to have left this important point out of its story undermines any factual objectivity that the broadcast may claim," he said.

The evidence on the record supports a reasonable understanding that Canadaland and Mr. Brown were suggesting the 1996 allegation was true and that Ms. Kielburger had misappropriated donations, Justice Morgan wrote in the ruling.

The WE Charity, which is part of the WE Organization, came under national scrutiny and lost many of its corporate sponsors in 2020 amid the controversy over the Liberal government's plans to have the youth organization run a multimillion-dollar student-volunteer program.

That year, WE Charity said it would close its Canadian operations, and that co-founders Marc and Craig Kielburger — who created the organization as children — would step down once the transition to a new board of governors was complete.

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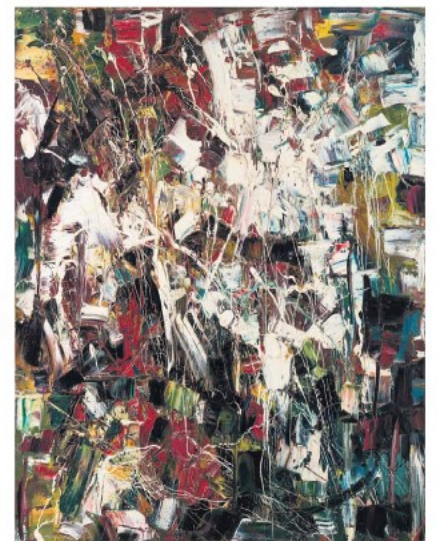
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