



17 Jean Paul Lemieux

CC QMG RCA 1904 – 1990

Jeune fille en uniforme

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1957 and on verso titled and inscribed 584-57-10 and \$600
35 ½ x 24 in, 90.2 x 61 cm

PROVENANCE

Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, 1958

LITERATURE

Guy Robert, *Lemieux*, 1975, a similar 1957 painting entitled *Françoise* reproduced page 250

Guy Robert, *Lemieux*, 1978, pages 240, 245 and 248

Suzanne Greist-Bousquet and Harvey R. Schiffman, “The Poggendorff Illusion: An Illusion of Linear Extent?” *Perception*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1981, pages 155 – 164

Marie Carani, *Jean Paul Lemieux*, Musée du Québec, 1992, pages 47 – 53 and 240

Johannes Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. 1, Søren Kierkegaard, editor; H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, translators, 1992, page 72

Caroline Desbiens, “Something Straight in Our Landscapes: Looking at the ‘Lemieux Effect’ in Quebec Nationalism,” *Ecumene*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2000, pages 211 – 213

Kevin Griffin, “Unknown Treasures See Light: UBC Alma Mater Society Displays Works by Major Canadian Artists Such as E.J. Hughes from Its Permanent Collection,” *The Vancouver Sun*, September 15, 2007, page D2

Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia: Permanent Collection, 1948 – 2008, 2008, reproduced, unpaginated

Bruce Mamer, “Oblique Shot (Dutch Angle),” *Film Production Technique: Creating the Accomplished Image*, 2008, pages 9 – 10

Aliyah Shamsher et al., *Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia Permanent Collection, 1948 – 2008*, Alberta Genealogical Society, 2008, unpaginated

Gaëtan Brulotte, *L’univers de Jean-Paul Lemieux*, 2015, pages 105 and 106

Michèle Grandbois, *Jean Paul Lemieux: Life and Work*, Art Canada Institute / Institut de l’art canadien, 2016, https://www.aci-iac.ca/content/art-books/10/Art-Canada-Institute_Jean-Paul-Lemieux.pdf, accessed September 5, 2018

EXHIBITED

Penticton Art Gallery, *Students Collect: University of British Columbia Alma Mater Society Student Art Collection: 1948 – 1968*, Collection of the Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia, July 11 – September 7, 2008

THE UNIVERSITY OF British Columbia’s Alma Mater Society Art Collection began its life as the Brock Hall Art Collection with the 1948 purchase of an E.J. Hughes painting done a year earlier. It cost a mere \$150 at the time, and a similar work *Fishboats, Rivers Inlet* was sold in 2004 by Heffel for \$920,000 (lot 47 in this sale). This far-sighted collection strategy was initiated by English professor Hunter Lewis some eight years earlier, when he had begun advocating that art on campus would have a salutary effect

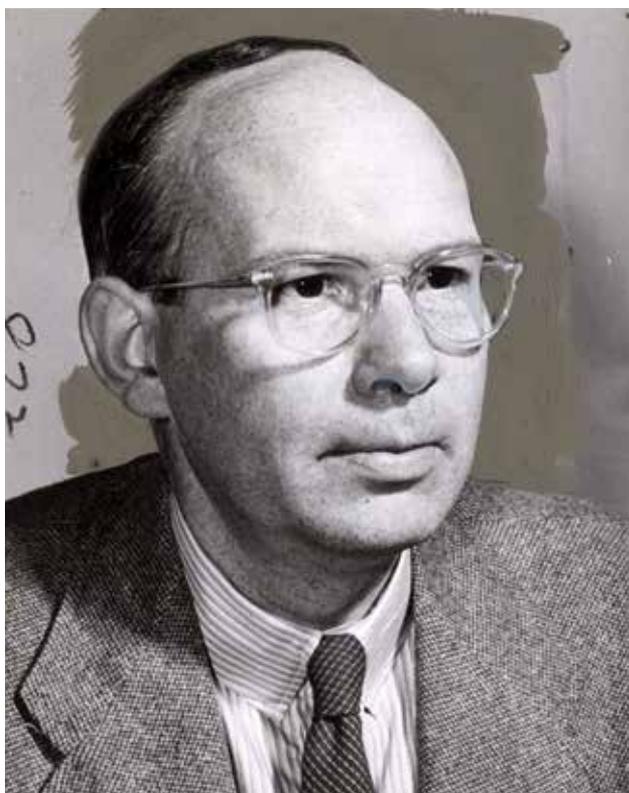


Brock Hall Art Gallery, circa 1960
Unknown photographer
University of British Columbia Archives, UBC 1.1/11094

on student life. He could not have known that between the years 1955 and 1968, energetic individuals such as artist and professor B.C. Binning and AMS vice-president Ron Longstaffe would undertake to build a modern collection of astonishing variety and quality.

Binning especially spurred the growth of the collection by communicating regularly with staff at Hart House at the University of Toronto, and through them with members of the original Group of Seven. These connections would prove to be immensely important, as was an opportunity afforded by *Maclean’s* magazine, when managing editor Pierre Berton and others wished to celebrate British Columbia in art. Binning accepted their invitation to join a group of Canadian artists for this purpose, and he managed to convince Berton to donate the commissioned works to UBC in 1958, building the collection and boosting the atmosphere of excitement and cultural vitality in one fell swoop. Important works by Lawren Harris, Gordon Smith, Jack Shadbolt and others soon adorned the walls of Brock Hall.

In the same year, perhaps seeking to diversify the collection beyond a purely BC focus, the Alma Mater Society acquired a painting by Jean Paul Lemieux, who was rapidly becoming one of the more celebrated Québécois painters of the second half of the twentieth century. Lemieux was influenced early in his career by the realistic naturalism of regionalist painters, probably facilitated by one of his early instructors, the so-called eighth member of the Group of Seven, Edwin Holgate. After passing through a period of Primitivism, in which narrative subjects poked fun at what writer Michèle Grandbois calls the “moral rigidity prevalent in Québec,” he gradually moved into a Minimalist period (1951 – 1955), in which paintings were increasingly simplified, until even busy Montreal street scenes appear at first glance to be nothing more than geometrical abstractions. *L’été à Montréal* (Summer in Montreal), 1959, is an excellent, albeit quite late example. Although marking a return to more implicitly narrative themes,



B.C. Binning, co-founder of the Department of Fine Arts at UBC, circa 1960
City of Vancouver Archives, AM1616-CVA 136-028



Hunter Lewis, UBC professor, circa 1950 – 1959
Unknown photographer
University of British Columbia Archives, UBC 1.1/5411.1

in the Classical period (1956 – 1970) that followed, Lemieux’s works retained a strong element of simplification and abstraction. Isolated figures began to appear in desolate, uncomplicated landscapes, creating a unique visual vocabulary that would ensure the artist’s immense popularity.

Jeune fille en uniforme (Girl in Uniform), 1957, is one of the Classical period works for which Lemieux is rightly considered an iconic artist. Against a mostly empty background, a solitary figure stands very close to the right edge of the image, as if to suggest she is part of our space. She just happens to be in the way of our view, like someone photobombing our snapshot of the vista. The casualness of this representation belies what some feel is “the critical centre of his art,” the quest to use the human figure as a symbol of something else. Most of Lemieux’s figures share certain characteristics: they face us directly, motionless, arms hanging slackly, wearing restrictive clothing. They seem always to symbolize submission, malleability and “a life of sacrifices,” as Gaëtan Brulotte wrote. Marie Carani, who wrote the catalogue for a posthumous Lemieux retrospective at the Musée du Québec in 1992, characterized these elements as a “Lemieux effect,” which she defined as “a metaphysical poetry of nature, transformed into imaginary landscapes that ... invite meditation and contemplation ..., suggesting the presence of another story, one of tragedy.”

The work offers a fusion of disparate impressions that parallels the critical reception of Lemieux the artist. He was, at one and the same time, immensely popular and a critical darling—two reactions that do not often coincide. One of the consequences is that writers have occasionally taken him to represent a specifically Québécois mythology in which “territorial nationalism” symbolizes national identity for francophones. For instance, Caroline Desbiens compares the horizontality of Lemieux’s landscapes (even in vertical pictures) to the rhetoric and visual culture accompanying Jacques Parizeau’s “Declaration of Sovereignty” that preceded the 1995 Quebec independence referendum. In such interpretations, the landscape is specifically understood as rural Quebec, serving as a metaphor of territorial belonging. For Lemieux himself, however, the landscape seems to have served more metaphysically as a symbol of “the oppressive effects of horizontality on man,” which biographer Guy Robert explained as an ambiguous symbol of “the solitude and alienation of human beings.” Carani agrees, asserting that the subject was only a means for Lemieux, not an end.

Jeune fille en uniforme illustrates both a solitary individual and the landscape as a possible symbol of nationhood, but it does so in a manner that allows us to transcend the limitations of both in order to contemplate a kind of existential uncertainty. Note



Ron Longstaffe (top right) and the UBC Student Council, 1955 – 1956
 Photo: Campbell Studios
 Courtesy of the AMS Archives

that the horizon line is not exactly horizontal, for it rises ever so slightly from left to right. If we assume it to be a continuous, straight line without significant topographical variation, it illustrates the Poggendorff illusion, as discussed by Suzanne Greist-Bousquet and Harvey R. Schiffman, in which a viewer misperceives the segment of the horizon line on the right of the figure as correctly aligned with the segment on the left of the figure. This alone plants a subtle doubt in the mind of a methodical viewer. It is a little like the so-called Dutch tilt used in cinematography, in which a camera shot is composed so the horizon line is not parallel with the bottom of the frame, to suggest disorientation or even madness.

Similarly, the figure is slightly “off.” Not only is she pointlessly “in our way,” she is implausibly attenuated, and her arms, planted firmly at her sides, suggest an inability to act. The darkness of her clothing, contrasting with the brighter colours of her face, also suggests immobility, perhaps even entrapment. Of course, that her clothing is a uniform suggests the absence of a fully autonomous self. Then we notice that her expression is purposefully ambiguous, her stylized face seeming to alternate between bemusement, annoyance, indifference and skepticism. Our inability to pin down her mood is a sign of existential subjectivity. Even the sketchiness of the paint application suggests uncertainty.

Guy Robert wrote that Lemieux once stated, “I paint because I like to paint. I have no theories. I try to express in my landscapes and characters the solitude in which we all live and, in every painting, the inner world of my memories. The surroundings in which I find myself are only of interest because they allow me to paint my inner world.” In light of this, *Jeune fille en uniforme* begins to seem like a reflection of Søren Kierkegaard’s description of the “single individual,” which maintains, among other things, that “subjective truth” is not a matter of the external world, but of introspection and experiences necessarily shared between sender and receiver. Similarly, Lemieux saw his peopled landscapes as pictures of a self-experiencing solitude. Robert put it more poetically by proposing that Lemieux uses “horizon lines as barometers of the soul.” *Jeune fille en uniforme* is clearly a masterpiece in this genre.

We thank Robert Belton, Associate Professor, Art History and Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies, the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 500,000