

TRIBUTES TO DONALD W. BUCHANAN

Robert Ayre

Friends of the arts throughout Canada will be gratified by the appointment of Donald W. Buchanan as Associate Director of the National Gallery, in charge of special projects...I can say that he will be a strong right hand to Alan Jarvis, the new Director. He is a man peculiarly fitted by inclination, energy and training for the Gallery's extension work and expansion program...he has developed the knowledge and technical ability needed for his new position.

At the same time, with the thoroughness that is so characteristic of him, he has made the most of those opportunities to know Canada. Born at Lethbridge, Alberta, son of the late Senator Buchanan, he is one of those Westerners who take the whole country for their bailiwick...

One of the first things that strikes you in Donald Buchanan is his Canadianism. In his radio and film work, in his writing – the Phaidon book “Canadian Painting from Paul Kane to the Group of Seven”; the further range, “The Growth of Canadian Painting”; the Morrice biography, and his numerous magazine articles – and in his efforts to improve Canadian taste through the Design Index, he has helped develop our self-consciousness as a nation, has made us better known abroad and has endeavoured to make us better worth knowing.

Robert Ayre, “The New Associate Director of The National Gallery,” *Toronto Daily Star*, July 16, 1955.

Robert Ayre

News of the sudden death of Donald W. Buchanan in Ottawa on Saturday night came as a profound shock to his friends in Montreal, to his associates on Expo '67 committees and to all throughout the country who knew of his distinguished contribution to the arts. He was a member of the board of trustees of the National Gallery, which he had served in several capacities for many years, and when he left in 1960 he relinquished the position of associated director which he had held since 1955. He had much of the

responsibility for the planning of the new gallery and the move from the old National Museum, and for the erection of the Canadian pavilion at Venice to house our exhibits at the Biennale. When he was head of the industrial design section, he did a great deal, through the Design Index, to improve manufacturing standards and public appreciation of good design.

He was secretary of the advisory committee on fine arts for Expo '67, as well as supervisor of cultural themes and co-ordinator of the fine arts exhibition. It is sad that he will not see this work brought to fruition, but it was only one of the many ways he found to serve the cause of the arts in Canada...

In 1936 he published his biography of the Montreal painter James Wilson Morrice. "The Growth of Canadian Painting," in which he discussed some 30 artists he had visited in their studios, many of them personal friends, appeared in 1950, to be followed five years later by the large format Phaidon Press book on Canadian painting. He contributed to numerous periodicals and from 1944 to 1959 he and I were associated as joint editors of the magazine *Canadian Art*.

I never heard him admit to a secret desire to be a painter himself, but in 1959, "driven by some long, repressed urge," as he says, he bought a camera and found himself "recording for a brief period, with awed and curious eye, the appearance and growth of Canadian cities."

...I will always remember him as a great Canadian.

Robert Ayre, "Art World Mourns: Donald Buchanan, A Great Canadian," *The Montreal Star*, February 28, 1966

Joyce Fairburn

The late Donald Buchanan yesterday received perhaps the most meaningful tribute the artistic world can offer one of its own.

His very last work was published posthumously, thanks to the combined goodwill and financial sponsorship of a group of 10 of his close friends, some of them giants in Canada's cultural community.

The book was launched in the grand style at the National Gallery of Canada by old friends and admirers with a quiet ceremony and bottles of good wine...

Yesterday's tribute was a fitting one for the writer-photographer who was one of the moving forces in establishing the National Gallery and served as its associate director until 1960.

Before his death in a car accident two years ago, Mr. Buchanan had completed a study of photographs and poetry of Ossip Zadkine, one of the leading contemporary sculptors in the world.

...Among them were Canada's outstanding portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh, Mr. Buchanan's brother Hugh, Edward McNally of Calgary and Mrs. H. A. Dyde of Edmonton, a friend for more than 30 years.

Chief organizer of the little group was Hamilton Southam, the director of the national centre of the performing arts in Ottawa....

...The tribute paid to him yesterday was a frank and moving testimony of the extent to which his mysterious personality affected those who knew him well.

The most eloquent [tribute yesterday] came from Zadkine himself and is contained in a preface to the book.

Joyce Fairburn, "Artistic World Pays Tribute," *Lethbridge Herald*, September 29, 1967. [Joyce Fairburn was a Senator in the Canadian government.]

Alan Jarvis

Thanks to Donald Buchanan [for the new facilities of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa]...with all the publicity that attended the opening of the Lorne Building – too little mention was ever made of a most remarkable Canadian, the man who really masterminded the interior organization of the building and who supervised the complex operations involved in carrying out the move expeditiously and utterly without mishap to a single work of art. That character (and I use the word consciously and advisedly) was Donald W. Buchanan, until recently the Associate Director of the National Gallery. Buchanan is a man who has enriched Canada's cultural life, single-handedly and single-mindedly, to an almost unaccountable degree....

Alan Jarvis as quoted in "Donald Buchanan," *Vancouver Province*, October 7, 1960.

Harry McCurry

In my opinion, he is in every way the type...we badly need in Canadian Museum Service...I consider him extremely well-fitted [to work in the National Gallery].

Harry McCurry in a letter dated September 29, 1934 to Hon. Vincent Massey, National Gallery of Canada Archives.

Jack Pickersgill

[Donald Buchanan, former associate curator of the National Gallery, is the man to head up the National Design Council, Hon. Jack Pickersgill has suggested in the Commons.

Mr. Pickersgill made his suggestion during the Commons debate on setting up the council.]

If there is one man to whom the Canadian people owe the design council and the pioneering work it has done in the last decade or more it is to Mr. Donald Buchanan, who has associated with the National Gallery and who provided most of the initiative and inspiration for the starting of this work...

-, MP Gives Choice For Design Post, *Ottawa Citizen*, May 2, 1961

Hamilton Southam

A speech by Hamilton Southam on the occasion of the posthumous book launch of Donald W. Buchanan's book,

Le Monde secret de Zadkine vu par Donald Buchanan/

The Secret World of Zadkine as Seen by Donald Buchanan

(Paris: Editions L'art, 1967) at the National Gallery of Canada, September 28, 1967

With only a few minutes in hand I hesitate to sum up so complex and wonderful a person as Donald Buchanan. He was both a private and a public person. With your permission, I would like to say a little about both his personalities – starting with the private one. He was a very private person – reserved in manner and mysterious in style. We are met this afternoon to consider a book called “The Secret World of Zadkine as Seen by Donald Buchanan”. Truth to tell, there was a secret world of Donald Buchanan, or perhaps even a universe of secret worlds.

A capital element in Donald’s situation was undoubtedly his deafness, brought on by a serious illness in his younger days. But anything our friend lost through the enforced dullness of his ears he more than made up by the extraordinary use he put his eyes to. Donald’s affliction was not nearly as

heavy as that which destiny visited on John Milton, but he could almost say with that great poet:

With "...wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate..."

Donald was a seer, and because he saw as he did, his mind was luminous, and he was magical. He appeared and disappeared over the years in accordance with some rule of life he never bothered to explain. He was one of the freest men I ever knew, incorrigible bachelor that he was, though not the happiest. He seemed to envy his married friends their domestic felicity, and would come from time to time to share it. After a year's absence or so there would be a knock on the door, or a phone call, and Donald would have come back for a few days. Despite his gruff manner and his irregular hours Donald was one of the best of house guests. He was fundamentally a dear and gentle person – my wife would put it that way, so why shouldn't I? – and he got on well with children, which is always a good test of a bachelor's worth.

...Marvelous, because within it his own secret world was linked to those of others – to the secret world of Zadkine, for example, or of Giacometti, or of Moore, or of Matisse – and in his conversation he led you entranced from one to the other.

You will forgive me for having spoken this much of Donald Buchanan as a private person. He was, of course, an important public figure as well. His contributions to this country, particularly in the field of the arts, were of incalculable value. For thirty years – to the day of his death – he was a discoverer, a founder of institutions, an animator of cultural movements of great importance for Canada. He played key roles in the early days of the CBC and of the National Film Board. He founded the National Film Society before the war, and had a hand in founding *Canadian Art* during the war. He helped set up our Design Council and served for several years as Associate Director of this National Gallery. He was never busier – nor more creative – than in the days before he died. No one contributed more than he to the success of Expo's extraordinary exhibition of the fine arts. In a couple of years, when the National Arts Centre opens across the street, you will be able to see the fruit of his work as the first chairman of our fine arts committee.

Donald's last project was this book on Zadkine which we are launching today. He attached a good deal of importance to it – and you will

readily see why when you look at it. It's an important book, not only because it has a good deal to say about Ossip Zadkine – undoubtedly one of the two or three leading sculptors in the world today – but because it says something also about Donald, whom some of us regard as having been one of the most significant Canadians of our generation. Essentially, it is a book about one wonderful person by another such person – read it, and see for yourself what I mean.

In closing I would like to thank Ossip Zadkine himself for his kind help in preparing the book, and particularly for the perceptive note about Donald which he contributed by way of a preface to it....

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Ossip Zadkine

...but what struck me most, after a few moments, were his eyes. They radiated a sort of presence, a quietude; they were an instrument of great perfection, that obviously served far more purposes than just going to the right or the left. Eyes that gripped one and never let go. They searched the very depths of one's being. When he walked along the streets his eyes did not just take in the walls, the street or the distance, but penetrated "*the object itself*"....

O. Zadkine, "The Imaginary Museum of Donald Buchanan", *Le Monde secret de Zadkine vu par Donald Buchanan*, (Paris: Editions L'art, 1967)