

## *The Mystic North*

*The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940*. An exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 13 January – 11 March 1984; circulated to the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio, 31 March – 13 May 1984.

Catalogue: Roald Nasgaard, *The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America 1890-1940*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press in association with the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984. 253 pp., 161 illus. (40 in colour), \$47.50 (cloth) and \$19.95 (paper).

The title of this important exhibition of one hundred and twenty-nine works by thirty-one artists raised expectations that at least three issues would be addressed. First, it suggested that mystic content in the exhibited landscapes would be stressed. Second, because 'mystic north' is a phrase taken from J.E.H. MacDonald's enthusiastic recollection of the response he and Lawren

Harris had to an exhibition of Scandinavian art seen in Buffalo in 1913, it was implied that the influence of Scandinavian art upon The Group of Seven would be thoroughly examined.

Whereas 'the mystic north' is an attractive slogan, it is a somewhat misleading title for this exhibition, for the third – and principal – concern of the exhibition's organizer, Dr. Roald Nasgaard, is to be found in the more cumbersome subtitle. He postulates a definable subspecies of Symbolism, Northern Symbolist landscape painting. This, he argues, had two phases: a European one ranging from ca. 1890 to 1910, and a North American one extending from ca. 1910 to 1940; this thesis subsumes the related issues of mysticism and of The Group of Seven's Scandinavian sources. As Nasgaard notes in his preface, 'this exhibition, bringing together for the first time the work of the Canadians and the Scandinavian work that had impressed them, offered the opportunity to explore more comprehensively the notion that

FIGURE 1. Installation view of *The Mystic North*, Art Gallery of Ontario. Works by Gustaf Fjaestad (19/45), J.E.H. MacDonald (69/108), Lawren Harris (37/109) and Akseli Gallen-Kallela (28/30). Numbers refer to the catalogue, followed by plate numbers corresponding to the publication. (Photo: Museum)



there was indeed a body of northern Symbolist landscape painting with a common set of subjects, feelings, and structures' (p. ix).

The common subjects have primarily to do with wilderness: forests, expanses of snow, suns, panoramas of unpopulated landscape, mountain summits, seas and waterfalls. The shared stylistic features, or 'structures' which Nasgaard identifies, include a frontal planarity that seems to close pictorial space to physical access, a simplified and concentrated approach to form, a preference for elemental and monumental form over atmospheric subtleties of light and colour, and a balance between the claims of fidelity to the natural motif and the desire to abstract the forms of nature in order better to communicate symbolic content. Nasgaard characterizes the 'common set of ... feelings' as a 'striving for the expression of affective or transcendental content through close communion with an intimately experienced landscape' (p. 8). Such content includes both the expression of 'personal and patriotic feelings for ... natural surroundings' and the extraction of 'higher meaning out of external nature' (pp. 6, 8), a meaning which Nasgaard variously terms 'spiritual,' 'mystical,' 'supernatural,' 'transcendental,' and 'visionary.'

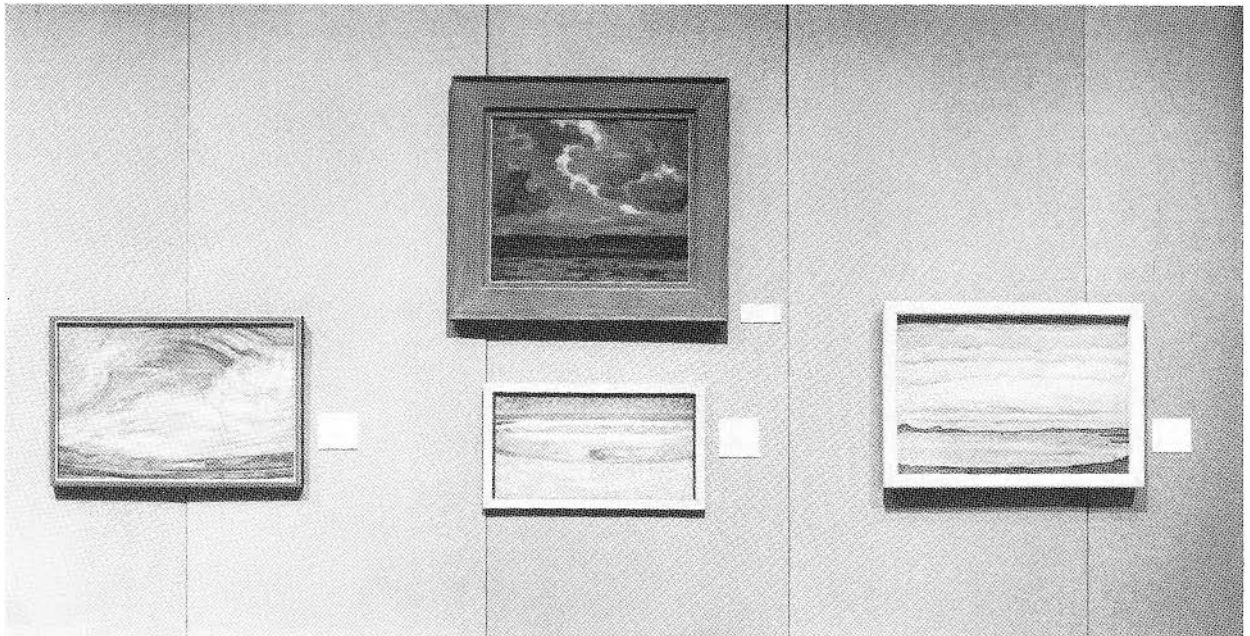
*The Mystic North* publication is a book which complements an exhibition, not an exhibition catalogue as such. A four-page checklist insert functions as the catalogue; most regrettably, it has no cross-reference of its numeration of works exhibited to that of plates in the book. All works in the exhibition, along with some comparative illustrations, are reproduced in the book, with an asterisk identifying illustrations of works in the exhibition. (In this review, plate references are to the numeration of the book.) *The Mystic North* is a substantial and

attractive publication with good quality illustrations. One can forgive the number of typographical errors (e.g. Gaugin, pp. 35 and 252; Strinberg, p. 243; Solberg, p. 4; Berg, p. 36; Steilen, p. 125), by the uncommon virtue of the book having been ready when the exhibition opened.

The exhibition itself rendered the book's thesis plausible but not incontrovertible. Happily, the exhibition could be approached both as a unified visual argument to ponder and as an interesting diversity of visual facts to savour. Perhaps the most completely successful aspect of *The Mystic North* was its installation, which skilfully juggled the competing claims of chronology, nationality, groupings by subject-matter, opportunities for stylistic comparisons, and the exigencies of demonstrating Nasgaard's argument (Figs. 1 and 2).

The first gallery, for example, opened with a pairing of works designed to introduce the viewer to Canadian-Scandinavian affinities. Because Fjaestad's *Winter Moonlight*, 1895 (pl. 44) was beside Harris' *Snow*, ca. 1917 (pl. 109), the viewer was afforded a cogent argument both for the response of Harris to 'Fjaestad's revelations' and for Nasgaard's claim that while both possess the subjects, feelings, and structures distinctive of Northern Symbolist landscapes, the Canadians can be distinguished by bolder paint-handling and brighter colour. The first gallery consisted of Canadian and Scandinavian works (the only exception being one work by Hodler, a Swiss), thus initially placing stress on the specific impact of the 1913 Buffalo show on The Group of Seven. The featured subjects in this gallery were snow scenes, waterfalls, and lakes screened by trees.

FIGURE 2. *The Mystic North*, works by Emily Carr (6/33), Piet Mondrian (77/99 and 77/100), and Ferdinand Hodler (57/85). (Photo: Museum)



A grouping of five works near the outset of the first gallery provided visual evidence for contentions advanced in Nasgaard's second chapter. There he effectively uses two paintings by Munch to demonstrate a shift from Naturalism through Naturalistic mood painting to a fully Symbolist and Synthetist treatment of landscape; the distinction resides primarily in a 'restructuring of pictorial space from the representational to the symbolic – a transformation from a space of potential physical access to one of purely visual entry' (p. 14). In the gallery grouping, Prince Eugen's *Forest Clearing*, 1892 (pl. 32), and Sohlberg's *Night Glow*, 1893 (pl. 66), have this Synthetist space only incipiently; in their near-monochrome colouration, limited tonal range, and relatively tight paint-handling they retain many of the hallmarks of Naturalistic mood painting. Both Willumsen's *Spanish Chestnuts, Ornamental Landscape Composition*, 1891 (pl. 3), and Munch's *Melancholy, The Yellow Boat*, 1891-1892 (pl. 2), are more abstract in forms, bolder in execution, more compressed in space, and more keyed to a unifying shape-motif. Willumsen's work, as the title indicates, is primarily decorative in its departure from Naturalism, whereas the Munch, as the title suggests, is expressively symbolic.

*Melancholy* is one of the very few works in the exhibition which contains figures. For Nasgaard, the physically inaccessible space of Northern Symbolist landscapes is virtually inseparable from 'the absence of figures ... [which is also] a consistent characteristic' (p. 234). *Melancholy* was present as an early manifestation of Symbolist space and also because of Nasgaard's debatable claim that Munch's figures are 'not essential to the establishment of the mood of the painting' (p. 14) – debatable because the vulvar rock which hovers like a concretized thought-balloon above the head of the melancholic and jealous foreground male would lose intelligibility without this figure, who has projected into inanimate nature his frustrated erotic desires for the woman on the pier.

Be that as it may, *Melancholy* was placed aptly close to Hodler's *Autumn Evening*, 1892 (pl. 79), a pure landscape which contains overpainted figures, one of which had provided spatial ingress, as may be seen in a sketch for the painting (pl. 80). A consequence of this overpainting was that the autumn evening landscape alone carried the symbolic burden of expressing the imminent end of a journey along the path of life. Nasgaard states that the eradication of a figural mediator between viewer and nature transformed 'the viewer ... from an observer to a participant in the mysterious revelation of nature's divinity' (p. 127). As is the case with other of his interpretations, one can grant the symbolizing of divinity but question whether that divinity is realized within or beyond nature. The imagery of a path leading from fallen leaves to celestial light here favours a reading of transcendence rather than one of immanence. (This was ably demonstrated by Sharon Hirsh in a paper, 'Le chemin symbolique,' given at *The Mystic North* symposium held at the Art Gallery of Ontario on March 10.)

While looking at *Autumn Evening*, one could glance ahead to Gallen-Kallela's *Waterfall at Mäntykoski*, 1892-1894 (pl. 21), the most imposing work in the first gallery, and one which also once had figures (an overpainted water-nymph musician and a listener). Whereas the space of *Autumn Evening* was still relatively deep and accessible, the Gallen-Kallela is indeed a closed-space landscape without figures that intimates symbolic content, identified by Nasgaard as a 'pantheistic celebration of the music of nature' (p. 51). The hanging of this work, therefore, succeeds at multiple levels: in subject matter, it relates to nearby waterfall images; in overpainting, it refers back to Hodler's *Autumn Evening*; in its space and depopulation, it is the prime evidence in this gallery of Nasgaard's thesis.

The first gallery is essentially the test-case for the Scandinavian-Canadian connection. Whereas the evident dependence of the Canadian work upon the Scandinavian seems to have struck some viewers as a national humiliation, certainly the quality of the Canadian work was no cause for embarrassment. In many of the pairings (e.g. Harris' *Aura Lee Lake, Algonquin Park*, 1916 [pl. 112] with Gallen-Kallela's *The Lynx's Den*, 1906 [pl. 31]), the Canadian work was distinguished by more coherent design and firmer brushwork. In this regard, however, it was revealing to see two versions of Fjaestad's *Running Water*, 1906. One was an oil (pl. 47), the other a woolen tapestry (pl. 46). The tapestry had the greater affinities with Group of Seven work and was, of technical necessity, characterized by clearer and more simple forms than were present in the dry and finicky facture of the oil.

One wishes more tapestries could have been included in the exhibition, not simply because of their beauty, but also because of their likely significance to 'The Group of Seven'. Four tapestries by Fjaestad were in the 1913 Buffalo show, and there was an illustrated article by Agne Branting, 'Modern Tapestry-Work in Sweden,' in the March 1913 issue of *The Studio*, pp. 102-111. A tapestry by Henrick Krogh, *The Spruce Coppice*, which was reproduced there in colour is quite as colourful as any Group of Seven work. Moreover, Krogh's reduction of the natural motif to shingle-like bands is strikingly close to similar stylizations as brushwork in such Canadian works as Harris' *Snow II*, ca. 1916 (pl. 110) and Thomson's *The Jack Pine*, 1916-1917 (pl. 117). Nasgaard buries this revealing tapestry, first mentioned by R.H. Hubbard, in a footnote (p. 244, n. 50).

In the second gallery, the visual argument shifted from the Canadian-Scandinavian relationship to the more comprehensive claim for a Northern Symbolist landscape tradition. Canadian and Scandinavian works were here joined by Dutch, German, and American ones. Effective subject-matter groupings included forests, cityscapes, churches, seascapes, panoramic vistas, and more waterfalls (Fig. 3). The focus changed from influence to affinity. More evidently than in the first gallery, nationalist interests were apparent (e.g. Hesselbom's *Our Country, Motif from Dalsland*, 1902, [pl. 42], and Gallen-Kallela's *Kullervo's Curse*, 1899, [pl. 24]), as were religious motifs (in church images by Mondrian,



FIGURE 3. *The Mystic North*, works by Helmer Osslund (98/51), J.E.H. MacDonald (77/122), Franklin Carmichael (3/123) and Marsden Hartley (44/136). (Photo: Museum)

Carr, and Sohlberg and ones of crosses by Dove and O'Keeffe). The Canadian works continued to compare favourably to Scandinavian ones and, in most cases, overpowered the small and often pallid American paintings. Robert Welsh's longstanding case for the importance of Mondrian's landscapes was firmly vindicated, as the Mondrians consistently revealed the qualitative differences between a major artist and the many more or less interesting minor artists in this exhibition.

If one function of *The Mystic North* was to encourage critical reassessments, then the second gallery – even while sustaining Mondrian's preeminence – afforded some surprises. One of these was the power and modernity of Munch's later landscapes, which give pause to any stereotype of Munch as simply a precursor to Expressionism who had shot his innovative bolt in the 1890s in the paintings of psychic dramas such as *Melancholy*. By placing Munch's *Forest* 1903 (pl. 60), near Kirchner's *Forest Interior*, 1919-20 (pl. 158), Nasgaard exemplified German Expressionism's debt to Munch; but he also revealed, by the comparison to the centrifugally exploding Kirchner work, Munch's greater capacity to fuse visually satisfying control with emotional release. Conversely, Munch's *Winter Landscape, Elgersburg*, 1906, (pl. 64) is every bit as stylistically innovative as Fauvism was in 1906, yet arguably richer than the French movement in expressive and symbolic content. Of this work, Nasgaard asserts that 'the season is late

winter, and the snow on the fields is thawing and uncovering the plow furrows which are exposed like sorrowful wounds' (p. 101). This reviewer likewise sees the landscape in anthropomorphic terms, but considers the foreground mounds riven by a cleft as buttocks and vulva, and therefore as an association of the imminent thaw and consequent fertility of nature with the female's potential for fecundity. Whereas the vulvar rock in Munch's 1891-1892 *Melancholy* was still contingent upon figures for meaning, by 1906 Munch was using pure landscape to symbolize the interrelationship of humanity and nature.

Apart from Munch, the most impressive Scandinavian represented was Hammershoi, who is barely mentioned in Nasgaard's text. Regrettably, only two works by him were included, but these two managed to imply a tradition of mystical landscape broader than the 1890 to 1940 period covered by the exhibition. While his *The Buildings of the East Asiatic Company*, 1902 (pl. 76), recalls the symbolism of the transcendent spiritual journey present in works of the German Romantic, Friedrich, Hammershoi's *Sunshine and Shower, Lake Gentofte*, 1902 (pl. 38), has a quivering luminosity and a shimmering stillness which communicate a sensation of immanent divinity and therefore bears an uncanny resemblance to Jack Chambers' works such as *Lake Huron No. 3*, 1971-1972. In addition to the striking visual similarity, Chambers' theory of perceptual realism which supported his late work was founded, in part, upon mystical and theosophical writings (see Carol MacDonald, 'Jack

Chambers' Perceptual Realism,' M.A. research essay, Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1984). Thus, it could be argued that paintings of the 'mystic north' continue well beyond the 1940 terminus of the present show.

The third gallery, like the second, was wide-ranging in scope (the second gallery contained works by twenty-five artists of nine nationalities; the third, twelve artists from seven countries). Hanging by subject-matter persisted (chiefly mountains and suns), but in this gallery there was some emphasis on groupings devoted to single artists (Hodler, Tack, and Vallotton). The exhibition culminated in an impressive sequence of sun images. Whereas *The Mystic North* had begun with some dark, heavy, and moody paintings, it terminated in a manifestation of light and colour. Intentionally or not, the very hanging of the exhibition seemed to imply a mystic progression. It was possible to feel that the installation had celebrated the four elements: water predominated in the first gallery; earth, in the second; air (skies above mountains) and fire (suns) in the last gallery (Fig. 4). It struck this viewer as curious that the final work in this exhibition devoted to paeans to nature was Willumsen's *Fear of Nature*, 1916 (pl. 63). On the other hand, this work seemed to anticipate the 'New Expressionism' of the 1980s and hence argued for the pertinence of this exhibition to the present.

Because *The Mystic North* encompassed three issues, it was triply possible to second-guess its organizer as to what should have been excluded or included. Had the exhibition dealt only with the Canadian-Scandinavian relationship, one could have objected that the Scandinavian works should have been restricted to those which could have been seen by The Group of Seven. Had it had Northern mysticism as its principal concern, one would have looked for works by the Lithuanian Ciurlionis, whose *Sonata of the Sun: Andante*, 1907, bears a remarkable resemblance both in form and in mystic meaning to Harris' *Riven Earth 1*, 1936.

Once matters of documentable connection and mystic content yield precedence to the broader thesis of a Northern Symbolist landscape tradition, concerns of quality, of variety, and of relevance to that tradition assume priority. This reviewer thought that the number of rather repetitive mountain images by Hodler and Vallotton was excessive, and that it would have been kinder to Osslund and Hartley not to have exhibited some quite egregious works by them (notably Osslund's *Before the Storm, A Motif from Lappporten*, ca. 1907 [pl. 52], and Hartley's *Paysage*, 1924 [pl. 137]). Burchfield could arguably have been included on the grounds that he was more of a nature mystic, had a more definite cult of the north, and was simply a better landscape painter than Hartley. Whereas there was a certain chronological neatness in having Canadians represent the 1910s and 1920s, with primarily Americans illustrating the 1930s, works such as Jock Macdonald's *In the White Forest*, 1932, or Brooker's *Snow Fugue*, 1930, could have demonstrated a second wave of Canadian-Scandinavian affinities in the 1930s.

Because *The Mystic North* is a complex concept which raises many issues, it is more difficult to evaluate than most exhibitions. Adulatory reviews in the daily press – most notably those by John Bentley Mays in *The Globe and Mail*, 14 January and 10 March 1984 – may have given the impression that *The Mystic North* was definitive, comprehensive, and conclusive. It was not. The exhibition raised three basic issues; these were addressed with varying degrees of completeness and success.

*The Mystic North* succeeded very well in demonstrating the thesis that there is a body of Northern landscape paintings with a common set of subjects, feelings and structures. Less clear is whether these attributes are distinctively Northern. Nasgaard anticipates this objection when he writes that the art in his exhibition is 'more than a mere sum of landscape paintings, executed in the North, which display Synthetist form or attempt to extract the supernatural from the natural motif' (p. 5). This 'more' is, however, nebulously defined and largely undemonstrated. It is said to be 'a subjective and heroic approach to landscape painting' (pp. 5-6) which, the Northern painters often claimed, had 'a spiritual profundity that French art, because of its preoccupation with technical facility, could not attain' (p. 6). One may object that the Northern artists were simply deluding themselves and that Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, 1889, for example, has considerably more 'spiritual profundity' and a more 'subjective and heroic quality' than, say, Nordström's flaccid *Winter Night*, 1907 (pl. 18). If the much higher quality of *Starry Night* is a consequence of 'technical facility,' so be it. For that matter Monet, a French visitor to Norway, in 1895 painted images of Mount Kolsaas in winter that convey to this viewer a more heroic and sublime north than is present in Fjaestad's fussily pretty *Snow*, 1900 (pl. 45). Monet, it might be noted, considered Norwegians timid about the cold.

Insofar as Nasgaard's criterion for exhibition was 'inner coherence based on a striving for the expression of affective or transcendental content through close communion with an intimately experienced landscape' (p. 8), the works of Monet at Giverny, Van Gogh in the Midi, and Cézanne at Mont Ste-Victoire all seem to qualify save for their Southern subjects. Monet's late waterlily panels are arguably the apogee of Symbolist landscape painting. Nasgaard himself allows that there is more than technical facility and formalist aestheticism to French art when he approvingly cites Fénéon on the 'mystical value' of Cézanne's work, or when he writes of Monet's late landscape subjects that they 'were perceived with increased personal intensity and thereby transformed into timeless and unified wholes sustained more by inner vision than external reference' (p. 5). Thus, while the character of Northern Symbolist landscape painting is well demonstrated by *The Mystic North*, the claims of its practitioners for its distinctiveness and superiority remain untested and quite debatable.

On the score of mysticism, Nasgaard's book is a valuable source of reference for artists' statements of mystical or spiritual intent. For many works, the author provides eloquent if occasionally obtuse affirmations of

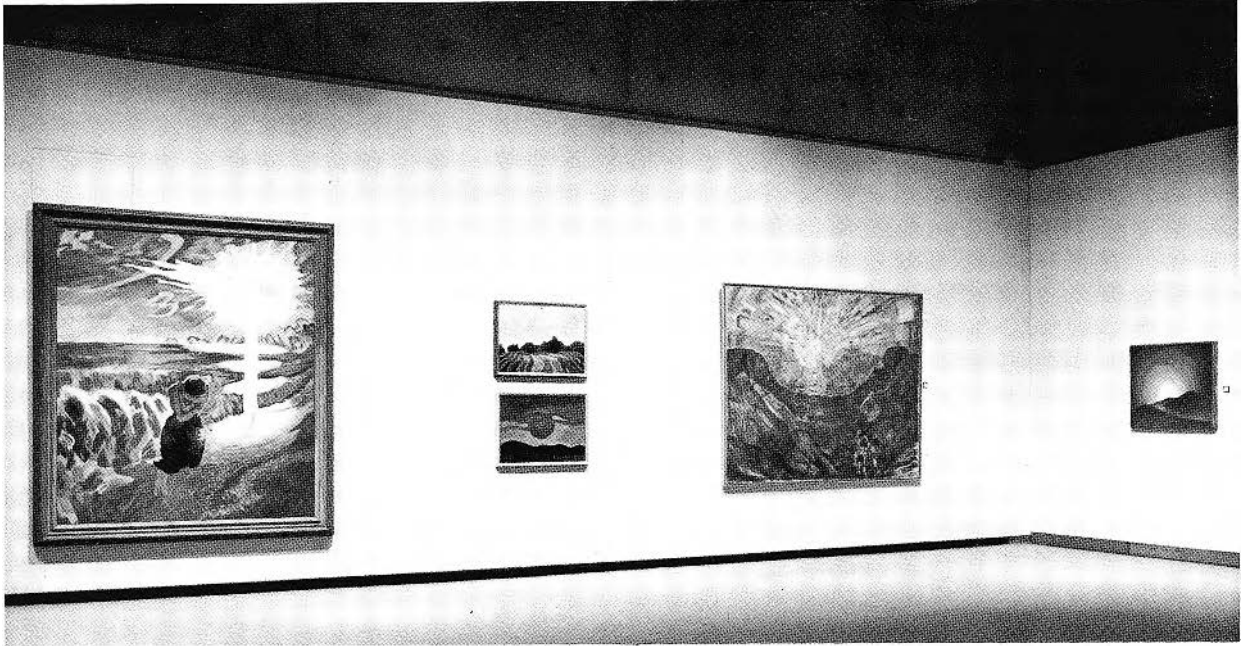


FIGURE 4. *The Mystic North*, works by J.F. Willumsen (128/63), Arthur Dove (11/145 and 12/146), Edvard Munch (86/61) and Georgia O'Keefe (95/149). (Photo: Museum)

their 'higher meaning.' The field of flowers in Sohlberg's *Flower Meadow in the North*, 1905 (pl. 73), for example, is described as 'a sumptuous prayer rug on which, if we dare defile it, we can conduct the rituals of a pantheistic moon worship' (p. 113).

However, the weakest aspect of *The Mystic North* may be its presentation of mysticism. Indeed, such phrases as 'the mystical trappings of Scandinavian national Romanticism' (p. 7) suggest that their author is discomfited by this dimension of the works on exhibit. In a book entitled *The Mystic North*, one expects to find a definition of mysticism or, at the very least, some bibliographical direction to the literature on mysticism (Nasgaard's book has no bibliography). This literature would distinguish between immanent and transcendent mysticisms. Nasgaard, however, tends to use 'transcendent' as if it were interchangeable with 'immanent,' as in 'the ideal of transcendental union with nature' (p. 210) or 'this mystical bonding with the landscape infuses their art with transcendent meaning' (p. 203). The Oxford dictionary, however, makes it clear that the two words are antonyms. Immanent means '(of God) permanently pervading the universe,' whereas transcendent means '(of God) outside of the universe.' To point this out is not simple pedantry. A significant difference in meaning and outlook exists between those works in the show which, like Hodler's *Autumn Evening*, treat nature as an emblem of the material world which must be transcended in the journey of the soul to a heavenly beyond, and those which, like Carr's work, seem to celebrate a spiritual life indwelling in nature. The transcendent outlook sees nature as signs of spiritual truths superior to the terrestrial world; the immanent mystic

apprehends nature as the manifestation of all-pervading divinity.

One would also like to know Nasgaard's thoughts on how one goes about identifying a 'mystical' painting. Is it by personal intuition? Is it done from statements of intent? Is it something one can determine by objective study of the work's iconography and style? Will works which are meant to express an immanent mysticism be different in iconography and style than those meant to express transcendence?

To be sure, Nasgaard's prime concern was not the mystic content of the art presented; nonetheless, one of his postulates is that Northern Symbolist landscapes drew higher meaning from external nature. For this to be convincing, the 'higher meanings' would have to have been more consistently articulated and demonstrated. In many cases, Nasgaard may be right in stressing the importance of indefiniteness and ambiguity in Symbolist art (p. 237). In others, he offers indefinite readings of works of art for which a more specific meaning has been advanced. Nasgaard's only interpretative comment about Dove's *A Cross in the Tree*, 1935 (pl. 147), is that it is 'typical of Dove's more intuitive insights into the forms and meanings of nature' (p. 226). Sherrye Cohn, however, has demonstrated that this work alludes to theosophical doctrines expressed in H.P. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* ('The Dialectical Vision of Arthur Dove: The Impact of Science and Occultism on His Modern American Art,' Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1982, pp. 150-151). Or, in the case of Lawren Harris, I have argued elsewhere that specific meanings for some of his landscapes – such as *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, 1920

(pl. 113), and *Elevator Court, Halifax*, 1921 (pl. 126) – can be deduced from the combined bases of visual and textual analysis ('Lawren Harris' Mysticism,' *Artmagazine*, 45 [Sept-Oct 1979], pp. 62-68). Nasgaard may not agree with these particular readings of mysticism in landscape, but the reader of his book is entitled to know that such studies exist.

In the end, the very title, *The Mystic North*, begs for clarification. MacDonald was writing of Scandinavian paintings when he remarked that 'they ... seemed to us true souvenirs of that mystic north round which we all revolve' (p. 3); but what did he mean by 'that mystic north'? Why was the north considered mystic? Why did Harris consider 'that the top of the continent is a source of spiritual flow' (p. 167)? To answer such questions would probably require intensive examination of each artist's mystical or theosophical sources, and would likely necessitate investigation of such aspects of the myth of the North as theosophical ideas about the aurora borealis, hyperborean Apollo, and the geographical origins of the Indo-Europeans or Aryans. At *The Mystic North* symposium, Reinhold Heller provided a brilliant example of how fruitful such investigations into textual sources can be in his paper, 'Edvard Munch and the Ideology of Nordic Landscape.' Therein he demonstrated the importance to Munch's landscapes of an esoteric volume by Theodor Daubler, *Das Nordlicht* (1910).

What *The Mystic North* does most effectively is to document and to demonstrate the connections between Scandinavian art and that of The Group of Seven. It does this so convincingly, in fact, that there may result an impression that Scandinavian art was the only influence of consequence upon The Group of Seven. Nasgaard finds (p. 184) similarities between Jackson's *October Morning, Algoma*, 1920 (pl. 124), and Osslund's *Autumn Evening, Nordingra*, 1910 (pl. 54). However, Osslund was not represented in the 1913 Buffalo show (an appendix to *The Mystic North* catalogue which listed the works in the 1913 exhibition would have been an asset.) Even in the case of putative connections which do involve works seen in 1913, such as that (p. 174) between Harris' *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and Sohlberg's *Fisherman's Cottage*, 1906 (pl. 74), one may question whether Harris still remembered clearly a work he had seen seven years earlier. Jacqueline Adell has argued

recently that there is a very discernible shift in The Group of Seven's style from a more decorative to a more sublimely expressive and symbolic art ca. 1919-1920. In the case of Jackson, this transformation is first evident in war paintings of 1918 that she sees as indebted to the 1917 and 1918 war art of Paul Nash, which Jackson would have seen in London in 1918. In the case of Harris, the shift is not evident until 1919, in paintings from the second box-car trip to Algoma. As Nash's war art was exhibited in Toronto in 1919 and as Jackson participated in the second box-car trip, but not the first, she argues for a chain of influence that connects Nash to Jackson, and these to Harris – influence that largely supplants that of the Scandinavians. ('British First World War Art and The Group of Seven,' M.A. research essay, Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1984).

Despite these reservations, *The Mystic North* is one of the most stimulating and persuasive 'thesis exhibitions' this viewer has seen. Dr. Nasgaard merits high praise for its organization and its very effective installation. The nature of The Group of Seven's debts to and affinities with the works and views of the Scandinavians has been established and made visible. Much valuable information on Scandinavian art hitherto unavailable in English has been presented. An original and insightful thesis about Northern Symbolist landscape painting has been advanced.

It is to be wished, however, that *The Mystic North* spawns further exhibitions and research. There is still a need for an exhibition which would encompass more fully the types of art which influenced The Group of Seven; for one which would address more directly the involvement of Canadian artists from The Group of Seven to Jack Chambers in mysticism and theosophy; and for one which would bring together Northern Symbolist landscapes with the landscapes of artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, the late Monet, and the Nabis in order that one might assess whether Nasgaard's claims for the Northerners and their claims for themselves can be sustained.

ROGER J. MESLEY  
Carleton University