



**MEDITATIONS ON THE PAINTINGS
OF
CARLE HESSAY**

LEONARD A. WOODS

**Meditations on the Paintings of
Carle Hessay**

Serenity's Domain

(Dedicated to the Memory of Carle Hessay)

These heights of majesty, Olympian
And royal-crowned with diadems of frost,
Were not attained by those who count the cost,
Or take their ease in fields Arcadian.

The trail ascends from pleasant valleys, starred
With summer flowers; through flick'ring forest glades
Alive with bird song; up by corried shades
And ridges where the barren slopes lie scarred.

The test of hardship now; cold winds and snow;
Of progress made with crampons, hooks, ice-axe;
Fatigue and labouring breath; exhaustion's strain!

The summit reached, the climber leaves below
Each lesser thing that from his peace detracts,
For this pure realm—serenity's domain.

Leonard A. Woods



Serenity's Domain



Carle Hessay

Meditations on the Paintings of
Carle Hessay

By
Leonard A. Woods

Edited with an Introduction
By
Maidie Hilmo

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Introduction

Carle Hessay must have felt the stirrings of a kindred spirit in my reaction to *Home in the West* because he took it down from the wall of paintings in his studio and gave it to me. It was my first real work of art and the first of the many Hessays I was to collect over the next couple of decades at prices always geared to what I could afford. In 1958, when he gave me the painting, I was still a high-school student working as a part-time waitress at Long's Cafe (later the Golden Pagoda) in Langley, British Columbia. If I remembered that he took extra cream for his coffee and brown bread with his meal, he gave me a 25 cent tip, which was unusually generous at a time when most regular customers didn't tip. His greatest gift to me was that, over the years as I progressed from high school to university and beyond, I learned to see the world with an artistic eye.

His willingness to share knowledge with those willing to learn came to mind recently when I saw a story on the internet about Mark Castagnoli, now president of Placer Gold Design and creative designer of jewelry made from mining by-products. He tells how he was taken by his mother on a childhood vacation in the wilderness around the Fraser River when he met Carle Hessay, the man who was to influence his life profoundly by teaching him the rudiments of digging for gold.

That would have been on one of the many prospecting trips Carle made to the interior of British Columbia, usually on weekends when he closed his sign painting shop. Carle often panned for gold and brought back a small vial of gold granules, B.C. jade or some other semi-precious gemstone he found on his expeditions. He also brought back raw materials for making pigments for his paintings. A familiar sight when I visited the studio behind his shop was that of Carle melting and stirring such ingredients above a Bunsen burner to make pigments. One of his specialties, learned from his art training in Dresden and Paris, was the chemical composition of colors. A striking characteristic of his art is his use of color. Often the emotional register and spiritual dimension of a painting are created by a dominant color scheme, reinforcing the thematic content.

Journeying into the vast, mountainous wilderness replenished his inner being and provided subjects for many striking paintings. His depictions of rocks and mountains testify to a confident prospector's knowledge of their stratification. Of documentary interest are the renditions of forgotten and abandoned logging and mining operations in the interior of Canada's westernmost province (*Forgotten Logging Camp* and *Abandoned Village*). There is a restorative quality about many of his paintings of the natural world he loved and in which he felt at home, including the pristine beauty of *Mountain Lake*, the Alpine freshness of *Serenity's Domain*, and the quiet reconciliation of his last painting, *Break of Day*. The first impression of austere loneliness in the setting of *An Ideal Prospector's Shack* is modified by the beauty and harmony of the clear waters of the falls and the enclosing rock formation.

His love of nature is reflected in the Canadian idiom of the Group of Seven in *Above the Yalakom*. There the rhythmic life force dances through the trees outlined against a soft palette of warm rock, green growth, and blue sky. A similar tracery of black, a distinguishing feature of much of his work, delineates the barren trees, the empty homestead, and the foreground of fallen logs in *Wilderness Swamp*—only this time it evokes the stillness of the end of the year. Carle had absolutely no fear of nature, whether of climbing precipitous rocks or of passing by its inhabitants such as rattlesnakes or bears. Because I knew that he had given bear meat to a family that had been suffering hard times, I once asked Carle to bring me some too, but he refused to indulge my curiosity.

As mentioned in one of the commentaries in this collection, Carle often puts the viewer right into the wilderness, unconcerned about how to get in or out. The artists of the Group of Seven usually painted nature from a standpoint of safety, with the possible exception of Tom Thomson. Carle's paintings are unique too in that he was a westerner painting as an insider, not as an art tourist, those inaccessible mountainous regions that were beyond the reach even of Emily Carr, his predecessor in recording the Pacific coastal regions with a sense of identification, love, and awe. Carle's art is original in its intimate portrayal of the terrain, much of it previously unexplored, whose strengths he felt and whose seasons and moods he experienced first-hand. Carle absorbed himself into the wilderness, traveling with grace and speed in his moccasins or second-hand cowboy boots.

He had a broad acceptance of humanity and felt at home among many different societies, including native cultures. In *Shuswap Wake* he dramatically portrays the mysticism and power of that native ceremony and a sense of the community of the living and the deceased which embraces both. He took me to Bill Reid's workshop before he was recognized world-wide for his carvings of native artifacts. Carle had the greatest respect for native art and a deep admiration for Mungo Martin, with whom Reid worked.

Carle's vision would sometimes darken, so that many of the paintings incorporate overtones resonating with the destructive forces of human history. Sometimes these are alluded to symbolically in landscapes (*From Here to Eternity* and *Magenta Fire*), and sometimes directly in an eerie visual revelation (*The Number of Man*). Nothing outraged him more than the abuse of authority against the vulnerable and helpless. Carle was a survivor not only of a cruel childhood but of the experienced horror of two wars—the Spanish Civil War and World War II. His *Xerxes* and *Dark Riders* contextualize war within the continuum of classical and biblical history. Partially under the influence of my husband, Wayne, who studied urban geography during our student days, Carle painted a small number of cityscapes which reflect his ambivalence towards the modern centers of western civilization (*The Great City*).

Although not represented in this collection, Carle also made a series of futuristic paintings entitled “The Hollow World” for a Canada Council project. As Carle wrote on a sign intended to be displayed with them, these paintings tell a story: “If man should survive, develop and learn the secrets of the cosmos, he will, in time, have an utopia. Many gifted men and

women will pool their knowledge and resources for the building of this new world. The story of these paintings begins in the year 3000 A.D.” The paintings of this series were intended for an exhibition at the Vancouver Planetarium, but they have never been exhibited.

The range of paintings selected for commentary by Leonard Woods are a good sampling of Carle’s extraordinary versatility in terms of experimental technique and his progress as an artist. The semi-abstract and suggestively bold renditions of his later work would not have been possible without the expertise gained by having surpassed the conventions of representational art. Confident brushwork is evident in all his work. He had a sense that he was painting for posterity, one of the reasons he was concerned about the durability and properties of various pigments and about providing the proper gesso ground before even beginning to paint.

A Carle Hessay painting is immediately recognizable by the strength of its character. Irrespective of subject, Carle’s work reflects the psychological depth and character of the man himself. The power one feels in viewing Carle’s work is largely a result of his deep empathy with all life, allowing him to present its essence in his art. He connected immediately with the downtrodden, with animals, and even with inanimate nature. On one occasion I wanted to give him some flowers from my parent’s garden but he thought them more beautiful in their growing state. In the last few years of his life he rescued a black lab named Sheba, who was to become his inseparable companion.

More than anyone else I ever knew, Carle traveled light, a survivor of many tragedies whose talent, self-discipline, and humanitarian values did not weigh him down with material possessions. He made what he could of what he was. He taught himself gymnastics, training on poles attached to two trees. He said that this was not the best preparation for the Olympics because this sort of makeshift structure didn’t have the flexibility of proper equipment. Nevertheless, in a letter of reference written to the armed forces in Canada in 1943, Jerry Mathison of the Recreational and Physical Education Branch in Vancouver refers to his gymnastic abilities, saying that Carle “is an all-round apparatus man” and that he is capable of instructing “High Bar, Parallels Bars, Pommel-Horse, Rings stationary and flying, vaulting, tumbling...” A little known legacy of Carle’s gymnastic teaching is that he taught John Hemingway, who in turn taught Karen Kelsall of Surrey, the leader of the Canadian team who achieved a top individual score of 9.7 on the uneven bars in 1978.

When I was still a student, Carle took me to the gym at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver to see the breathtaking performance of the Russian gymnasts he was instrumental in helping to bring to Canada. In gratitude, the Russian team sent him a carved amber fish, which he had no end of trouble getting out of customs at the time of the Cold War. Even in his last years Carle was always ready to entertain by doing hand-stands or performing diving feats. To cool off one summer when he had an art show at the converted railway station in White Rock, he and Sheba had great fun diving into the Pacific Ocean.

His cosmopolitan attitudes did not make him all that understood in the rather conservative atmosphere of Langley, yet Carle's art matured during his years there. He earned his "bread and butter" by making signs in the days when these were still done by hand. When he sold a painting, he would take us out for a meal to celebrate, often to such places as a Hungarian restaurant on Fourth Avenue in Vancouver where there would sometimes be gypsy music. He was quite a connoisseur of international cuisine and an excellent chef of a number of dishes, including crepes suzette and pumpkin chiffon pie.

It was in Langley that Carle was able to be most himself. He presented himself non-threateningly, like Chaucer the pilgrim, always ready with stories and funny anecdotes. He had an infectious sense of fun. His nephew, Wally, told me about the time when, as a pre-schooler, he was temporarily home alone in his second-floor bedroom in a house in Calgary when Carle came by to visit. Carle simply hitched his horse below and then climbed up and in through the boy's window to play cowboys and Indians with him.

Carle's child-like enthusiasm, lack of self-consciousness, and spontaneity were part of his creative genius. Although he had an adult's painful knowledge of the world, Carle had, as Leonard Woods mentioned to me, the purity of heart of a child. He was genuine in his warmth and goodness. And people responded to his openness. He never complained about his troubles: he used to say, "Just because I have a bellyache doesn't mean I have to give you one." Yet he was always there to help another.

He did not worry about being embarrassed or being disapproved of by the more conventionally minded. During his lifetime, his art was never accorded honor by the academic world. When his art shows were mentioned in newspapers, reporters tended to refer to his work as if they were commenting on the crudeness of the frames or the roughness of his clothes rather than on his paintings, which were easily more sophisticated than they had the expertise to assess. He was anything but a Grandma Moses.

His intuitiveness was accompanied by a fine intellect and an excellent memory. He knew classical literature by heart and would often tell me stories from Homer or, on a topic of conversation, refer to the thoughts of a classical philosopher like Socrates— not the sort of thing I was receiving in the school curriculum at the time. He loved to play chess and, in the days before email, often waited anxiously to see what move, in a match by mail, the chess master would make in response to Carle's latest move. A small chess set could always be found in the glove compartment of whatever old truck or camper he used to go inland for his weekend prospecting trips.

Although his life in Langley afforded him the stability to paint, which must have been the fulfillment of one of the dreams of this seafarer's life, he thought the highest art form was music. Once he remarked to me regretfully that when he studied music in Dresden, all the girls went for the taller men (he had to leave his studies there rather quickly due to his anti-Nazi sentiments). When the Queen Elizabeth Theatre was built in Vancouver, Carle invited my family to see some of the first operatic performances in this new venue. In his studio, Carle often listened to a recording of an opera while he painted. *The Magic Flute* was one of his favorite operas, and he thrilled to the voice of Maria Callas. He was an excellent pianist in his own

right, even though he never owned a piano. The fact that he often played for his supper at, say, the Lion's Club or at the Canadian Legion, is somehow emblematic of the sort of place he occupied in the town's social structure at the time.

Carle valued his relationships with other artists and always gave them their due. One acquaintance was Father Dunstan Massey, the fresco artist and sculptor at Westminster Abbey in Mission, British Columbia. When Father Dunstan first wanted to make frescoes, he found it difficult to find exact instructions for this ambitious undertaking. He was directed to Carle Hessay's sign shop. He was startled when Carle showed him his magnificent paintings stacked in such a provisional studio. As it turned out, Carle was delighted to be asked for his expertise, saying that it was nice to hear that someone in this part of the world had the courage to try fresco. In 12 pages of specific instructions, Carle wrote out the procedure for fresco making as he had learned it at the Kunstakademie in Dresden. When he took me to see some of the completed frescoes, Carle was very pleased with the results Father Dunstan had achieved. Father Dunstan, in turn, spoke at the exhibition of Carle's work at the Fort Langley Centennial Museum after Carle's death. Carle's work was also exhibited in White Rock, both before and after his death, at the Mind and Matter Gallery of his friend, the fine carver Arnold Mikkelson. Arnold and Carle had always enjoyed their arguments about art.

Carle once joked that the way to go would be to be shot by a jealous husband. This was not so unlike what actually happened. He attended a New Year's Party at the Sasquatch Inn on the Trans-Canada Highway at Spuzzum, British Columbia. After midnight, on January 1, 1978, he tapped someone on the shoulder to cut in to ask for a dance when he fell down, dying instantly of a heart attack. His certificate of Canadian citizenship states that he was born Hans Karl Hesse in Dresden, November 30, 1911.

In this brief introduction, I have tried to portray the Carle Hessay I knew and admired. Before he came to Langley he had a life that was very like that of Jack London in its improbable adventures and vicissitudes. The real Carle is expressed in his paintings and it is there that one can best look for him.

One of the disadvantages faced by serious artists in many of Canada's western and northern reaches is their spatial isolation from each other, making it difficult to exchange ideas and discuss new directions and techniques. At the time Carle painted, there were few critics knowledgeable enough to give constructive criticism or encouragement. Carle considered himself fortunate in knowing Leonard A. Woods, whose critiques he valued most highly and whose influence expressed itself in the paintings. In the early 1960s Leonard gave a talk at the Rotary Club exhibition of Carle's work. Then in 1984, Leonard was the principle speaker at the month-long celebration of Carle's art at the Dawson Creek Grain elevator gallery.

Leonard, whose own art background bridged both eastern and western Canadian influences, was a pupil of Lemoine Fitzgerald, the only prairie representative of the Group of Seven. Lemoine Fitzgerald, who had an important impact on Leonard's philosophy and practice of art, was director of the Winnipeg School of Art when Leonard began his formal training there in the autumn of 1937. Other influential instructors included George Overton, trained in design at South Kensington

School of Art in London. Concurrent with his studies at the Winnipeg School of Art, Leonard studied sculpture, including anatomy, armature building, casting, and patination of sculpture, with European-trained Byllee Lang de Marin, a woman who had opened a sculpture studio on Main Street. By the time Leonard graduated in 1940, war had broken out. It wasn't long before he was in uniform. Due to a health problem, he was discharged from the Air Force in the summer of 1943, becoming one of the first ex-servicemen to receive rehabilitation training at the Ontario College of Art. After studying under the renowned sculptor, Emanuel Hahn, Leonard graduated in 1945. Meanwhile, he had been selected to reopen the Sculpture Department at the Vancouver School of Art, a position he held until 1954. He also took over and held the position of Art Historian there until 1969. Leonard's commissioned sculpture included the dramatic and well-articulated angel musician figures in the St. Andrews-Wesley Church in Vancouver, as well as numerous animal figures done from life-studies made at various farms in the Fraser Valley.

Leonard left the Vancouver School of Art in 1969 and concentrated his work in his home town of Langley. Like Carle, Leonard's creativity transcends boundaries. Leonard was one of three musicians who banded together and, after years of devoted labor and with volunteers from the community, brought about the founding of the Langley Community Music School. Today this modern complex is idyllically situated in a spacious garden-like setting in Langley. During his Langley years, Leonard not only taught but wrote music, including that for use by the Maysfield Singers. In 1991 he completed the score for a two act opera called "Cowboys." Although he is now retired from teaching, Leonard still writes musical scores and poetry. An example of the latter is included at the end of this book for *Serenity's Domain*, which inspired a poem rather than a commentary. From this brief sketch of some of Leonard's accomplishments, it is easy to see why he and Carle found common ground for a friendship. This makes Leonard's reflections on Carle's paintings all the more meaningful, relevant, and insightful.

Maidie Hilmo
University of Victoria

Foreword

The following reflections are on the subject of the paintings of the late Carle Hessay, a resident for many years of Langley in British Columbia. Although I have made some observations on composition and design, I have attempted, primarily, to probe the thematic content of Carle's work. This is a fairly big job since the range of his motifs was quite encyclopaedic, covering contemporary and historical content, man and nature, as well as figure and landscape. The representations are variously romantic or realistic, literal or symbolic.

During the many years he worked among us as an artist, his development in the mastery of his craft was quite phenomenal. He embraced enthusiastically many of the contemporary developments in painting, experimenting extensively with mixed media and often making his own pigments from the materials of nature. As a result, his works are also highly varied from the technical point of view.

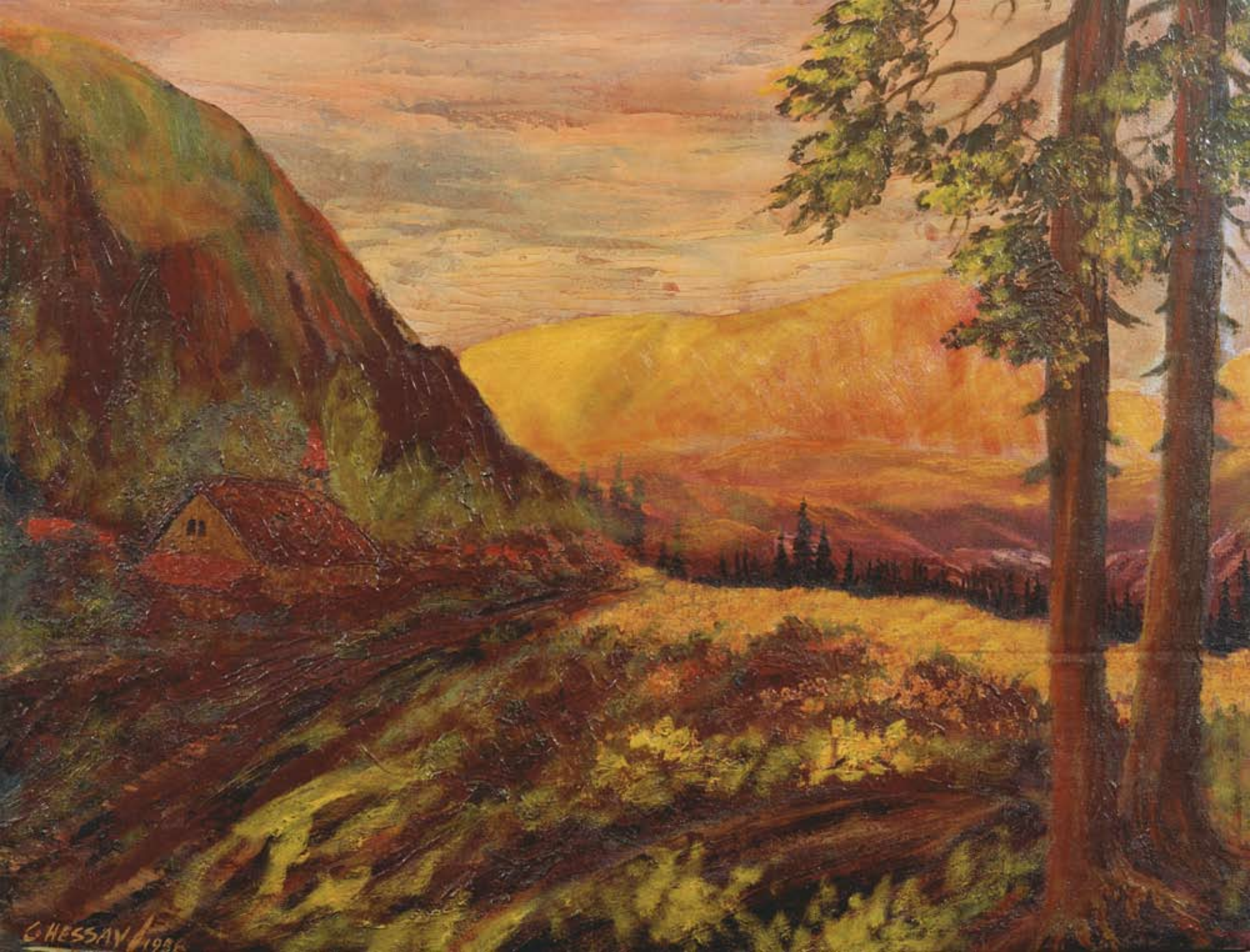
Carle came to Langley during the winter of 1950 to live with friends. He had been ill and was still far from well at that time. He came to us from out of the great unknown, and there were many things about him that we never did know with any certainty. Of this, however, we did become increasingly aware—that the essential person stood revealed in his paintings. I have drawn a number of vignettes characteristic of the man as we knew him in order to bring something of his unique personality to the attention of the reader.

His nature was full of surprises for he had experienced a wide spectrum of life. It was clear that he had travelled extensively during his younger years. He had an excellent knowledge of science, mythology, and the ancient philosophers. And what was most unexpected was his intimate knowledge of the Bible and his ability to use its time-honoured images as metaphors illustrating the condition that threatens modern man.

I have attempted nothing of a definitive or authoritative nature in these notes. They express the thoughts that have arisen in my mind as the results of contemplation given to each painting. My hope is that they may assist the reader—the viewer of these reproductions—of a richer appreciation of the mind and art of Carle Hessay.

Leonard A. Woods
Langley, B.C.

Paintings



G. HESSAY 1906

Home in the West

Home in the West is one of Carle Hessay's earliest canvases, dating from the late 1950's, when romantic realism was a common mode of expression for him. It is designed in great wedges of colour and tonality, the darkened shadowy forms penetrating a gold-emblazoned ground. Except for the receding distance behind the horizontal band of dark pointed conifers, the impasto is heavy and rich, and the colour opulent. It has the iridescence of a painted window.

The evening sun floods the slopes of the background mountains with golden rays of burnished, metallic intensity, highlighting the fields of the foreground and middle distance. In opposition to this brilliant and theatrically-lit landscape are powerful silhouettes. Dominating the right foreground are trees of statuesque strength. On the left the gathered darkness of the valley's eastern ridge holds in its wing-like shelter a small settlement canopied beneath its trees and bordered by a quiet country road.

This canvas depicts a tiny community that is in harmony with its natural surroundings and that seems to embody an ideal of happiness. There is a feeling of "Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man."

The theme is a common one and reflects a universal archetype: the profound desire of the human heart to find rest and fulfilment. Even the most casual search of mythology and folklore will reveal many examples, from the Gaelic "Land o' the Leal," or "The Land of Tir nan Og," to the old popular song, "My Little Grey Home in the West," which expresses the dream that "when the golden sun sinks in the West, and the toil of the long day is o'er...I'll come back to contentment and rest."

It is ironic that the creator of this picture, a gregarious person full of bonhomie and good humour, should have been virtually a homeless man. Restless and adventurous like the Flying Dutchman seeking the Senta who would redeem him from his wanderings, Carle had been a seaman who had visited many ports of call. When eventually he located in Langley, British Columbia, his living quarters behind his sign shop in the old Ayres Block could scarcely be considered as other than makeshift. A small area curtained off from the shop contained a cot bed, a hot plate, a couple of chairs and a table. Paintings were everywhere. They hung on the walls in homemade mats or frames, but chiefly they stood on end in great racks at the back presenting to the unaccustomed visitor a profusion of powerfully vibrating colours and forms. It was a highly charged but rather primitive accommodation to say the least. Yet from this base, he was to mature artistically as the tremendous energies released during the 1960's were to revolutionize his vision and painting technique.

1958



Mountain Lake

Some of Carle's works present a considerable problem of interpretation, and had you asked him for assistance in the clarification of meaning, you would no doubt have found him most uncooperative. Being a man of puckish humour and of a delightful sense of mischief, he would have returned your query with something like "Well, what do you see in it?" Mountain Lake, in contrast to many of his later paintings, is a straight-forward romantic landscape with no veiled symbolism or psychological implication. Yet it is one of his most agreeable paintings.

The dark tonalities of the mountains with their rounded summits and heavily forested flanks suggest that the scene is located somewhere in the moist interior of British Columbia, where little lakes are found nestling in the deep clefts of the Cascade and Monashee ranges. After an early snowfall, the clouds are breaking up and moving off, leaving the upper regions patterned in a rich mosaic of clouds, rocks, patches of white, and autumn colouring. It is probably near midday because the snow has apparently melted from the lower regions of the foreground. But the lake, reflecting the absolute stillness that follows a storm, has also the sheen and whiteness of a wintry chill. It is as though Carle has captured a drama of nature.

From viewing distance this picture appears to be closely harmonized in both colour and textures. It is surprising to find, upon closer inspection, that it was painted in a very free and vigorous manner. The brush strokes move in rhythmic flicks and bold slashes. There is much overlay of pigment achieved by spilling and dragging, resulting in a richly varied texture of great energy. From the pure pale blues and whitish areas of the sky where the lifting clouds reveal a distant range of cobalt blue mountains, to the diverse yellows and fiery oranges of willows, birches and aspens, right down to the blackish greens of the thickly pointed stands of conifers, there is a wide range of hue and intensity of colour. In the band of coppery maroon across the middle, the cool blues of sky and mountain are interfused with dazzling golds.

In spite of all this variation, an effect of great serenity predominates. Perhaps it is the calmly sustaining composition that is the true binding force with its complementary, undulating curves stretching horizontally from side to side, like slowly waving banners. Accented by the group of denuded tree trunks in the left foreground, the evergreens themselves provide the unit for a triangular counterpoint, moving vertically against these curves.

And there is the wonder of nature itself—before logging operations have decimated these forests or commercial fishing has depleted the lakes; before the arrival of the recreation industry with its blackened parking lots, and the noise of outboard motors; and before the days of the corrosion of acid rain. All is pure and uncontaminated; the world is revealed and celebrated in its primeval perfection.



C. HESSAY / 65

C. HESSAY

Forgotten Logging Camp

Like the kinetic art of the American abstract expressionist school, this work is large and spacious enough for the viewer to be virtually drawn into it and absorbed by its energies. A captivating enchantment of evening quiet, very immediate in its appeal, permeates the canvas, with something of the quality of a Whistler nocturne.

The subject, common enough to the west coast of Canada, is an old-time logging camp occupying the marshy area bordering a lake. Backed by a phantom forest of coniferous trees, the roughly utilitarian buildings, supported on stilts over the pervading dampness, are highlighted and reflected in the motionless water. Having once housed a working community of men, they are now deserted. The advancing tide of the rain forest marches in to repossess this territory.

The romantic evocation of this picture is enhanced by the quality of the paint itself. Over a unifying atmospheric ground of blue enamel, which is basic to the whole canvas, areas of indigo and blue-black are applied, creating a widely diffused shadowing of the scene. Adding textural enrichment and colour excitement are stipplings, draggings and smudgings of furtive greens, with highlights of yellow and hot reds.

The composition, which is fairly simple and uninvolved, presents a blunted arrowhead, massive and dark, lying on edge and pointing towards the right-hand side of the picture. It is bisected by a level line of brilliant colour from which all movement seems to push upwards and downwards, like an ink blot that has been folded, pressed, and released. Yet the impulses so generated are contained by a pervading atmosphere of stillness and peace.

In contrast to the low key dynamics of the design is the arresting and somewhat entranced expression of the picture. A common visual effect in the Pacific forests after a day of overcast skies and rain is that moment when the setting sun, sinking below the general cloud level, bathes the landscape in luminous light, intense and golden, powerful as a searchlight. Colours are amplified and unsuspected beauties stand forth in startling relief. There is always something revelatory and visionary about this experience. And here the old forsaken houses and the second growth vegetation are momentarily lifted from the plane of the mundane and transmuted into the splendour of some unworldly order of beauty. Suddenly the glory fades, the sun lowers behind the tree-fringed horizon, and the scene is claimed by the darkness of oncoming night. But Carle has caught and held the wonder of that spell, so evanescent and yet so memorable.

1965



68 HESS AV

An Ideal Prospector's Shack

From his home base at the back of his sign shop, each year Carle moved farther and farther afield for recreation and the enjoyment of friends, first by "shank's pony" in and around Langley, then by bicycle, by Volkswagen, by Jeep, and eventually by truck camper. His second-hand vehicles enabled him to penetrate and to stay in the less accessible parts of the province, to set up camp, and to work his unhurried way up the auriferous creeks with his pan and rocker. In such manner he found a restorative recreation and, at the same time, added enormously to his thematic repertoire.

In the composition of *An Ideal Prospector's Shack*, the predominating movement is seen as the slow curving arc which embraces the foreground, works in reversed mirror-like rhythms back through the rocky embankments behind the cabin, and finds its completion in the rounded summits of the mountains. A splendid contrasting pyramid with powerful uprights is provided by the dense thicket of black lodge-pole pines. The colour scheme is predominantly complementary, a clear sky-reflecting blue contrasted with the pale salmon pink of the rounded form of the rocks. The quality of the colour tends to be dry, except where glazes have been used, and there is much dragging of the pigment while wet, resulting in a fascinating "patchwork-quilt" effect.

Carle's title and his assertion that "I paint life as it should be—not as it is" might lead one to suppose that we have here an idealized version of the subject. Closer study, however, will dispel that delusion; it was painted by a man who knew the wilderness too intimately to deal in unrealistic fantasy. Carle once had a prospector's shack near the old Alexandra Bridge, which he commemorated in a drawing on top of an old end-table. His practice of staining and decorating unfinished furniture derives from his seaman days when this was one of his duties aboard ship.

The setting appears to be high in the mountains where the boreal forests, ragged and thinned, give way to the alpine meadows. Beyond the main scene is a rounded, snow-capped peak, the crowning summit of this particular range. Doubtless it shelters in its lower crevices and quarries the glaciers which feed the brook, and possibly entombs in its frost-bound matrix the prospector's goal: the Mother-lode itself.

Descending whitely in fresh-spilling rills is the mountain stream, cold and clear, coursing its way over sedimentary shelves and miniature rocky canyons and carrying along its burden of free gold. Above a pool where the water has collected in a rounded stony basin is the prospector's shack, roughly built of logs, primitive and unobtrusive, serving only the most basic needs for shelter. A section of fence railing just visible on the extreme bottom right suggests some domestication of the wilderness.

This location offers no threat with which the prospector cannot cope, either from the denizens of the wild or from the unexpected violence of the weather. He works alone in the bed of the creek, "toiling and moiling" as the saying goes, and he is happy with what each day brings upon the wings of its particular morning.



C. HESSAY '70

Above the Yalakom

This small but fresh and dynamically painted scene captures the essence of one of the most volcanically erupted areas in the whole of British Columbia: the eastern slopes of the Coastal Mountains. There rivers of picturesque name—Stein, Cayoosh, Bridge, and Yalakom—gouge their way toward the Fraser River from ice-capped peaks. The composition, which is acutely angular and charged with the energy of counter-thrusting forms, captures its primitive and compelling power.

Analogous to some of the works of Emily Carr and the Group of Seven, this painting reveals an interest in the fluid patterns created by the overall design. The dense tangle of dark conifers and grey wind-fallen trees that screen the forefront of the picture, like the articulating leaden outlines of a stained glass window, serve to reveal more fully the vast slopes of mountainous terrain that surge toward an unrevealed horizon. Wet enamel colours experimentally allowed to flow or bleed into each other add to the suggestiveness of the painting and create further abstract rhythms.

There is a spring-like feeling of bracing freshness in the air. Some snow appears to linger on the far right mountain peak. Within the depths of the valley, the river tears away at the canyon walls. An outcropping of pink granite rocks, so loved by the whistling marmot in these regions, forms the immediate base of the picture, the platform to which the viewer has climbed to ascertain his whereabouts.

This was the country Carle loved, the Mecca of his spiritual refreshment when, on weekends, he closed his sign shop in Langley and headed for the Fraser Canyon. For him the obstacles of tumbled river bed or of forest tangle were but the categorical aspects of a great, natural harmony. They offered little to daunt or to obstruct him, for he was the prototypal "out-of-doors" man, entirely adaptable and able to cope with the strenuous demands of the wilderness. Leaving his old camper parked beside the more accessible road, he would backpack his necessary supplies into untamed country such as that of the Yalakom. Stopping occasionally, he would test the creek for "colour." If he found any, he would use a portable sluice-box of his own design, for he was a practical, skilled prospector. Around his evening camp one would find few of the amenities of civilization, but there, stashed away in a corner of his kitbag, might lay paperback copies of Sophocles' *Antigone* or Cleator's *Lost Languages*. For Carle this kind of life was the realization of a deep contentment, and its quality is reflected in many of his canvases.

1970



C. HESSON

Wake for a Shuswap

Differences of colour, class, or creed had no divisive meaning for Carle except as they added to the interest and variety of life. He mixed with ease among all peoples; consequently, he often had entry into the social observances of communities with a different background. It says a great deal about the breadth of his culture and the strength of his intuition that he was able to portray the distinctive ritual of a funeral among the Shuswap people with empathy and psychological insight.

The community has gathered for a memorial service in some remote area sacred to the band, possibly their ancient burial ground. They may be in a forested area, but there is no light from the moon or stars to identify locale, and the darkness, which so densely embraces the group of mourners, seems to enclose them within its womb. This enveloping blanket of night is evocative of the suprapersonal, spiritual activity of man. The psychic atmosphere lends power to those gathered together to commune with the loved one who has passed into the unseen world. We cannot define the prone body of the deceased, but we feel his nearness as a spirit presence.

The sense of unity in the enfolding darkness is further strengthened by the assembling of the group about the fire, symbol of the life-giving element. The configuration of the group describes an egg-like ellipse, a circle foreshortened by perspective. The people form the Medicine Wheel of sacred lore, token of harmony and solidarity, the play of the microcosmos within the macrocosmos.

The whole band is here in a collective sense, their faces scarcely differentiated, each head a red-gold flame repeating the form of the ellipse. Ghostlike shapes loom behind the participants, evocative of the totemic guardians of the band. They hover mysteriously in the shadows, powerful yet friendly emissaries from the spirit world.

Carle has caught the essentially dramatic nature of native art. The rite is theatrical, enacted at night amid the flickering, insubstantial lights and dancing shadows cast by the ancestral fire. Half-seen faces and shapes emerge from and re-enter the darkness. We feel the hypnotic throbbing of the drums, timed to the rhythm of the heart and its pulse of life. We hear the pentatonic chants, possibly the songs of the departed one, revealed to him by his guardian spirit at the time of his adolescent initiation. We catch the essence of Indian culture, highly psychic, mystic and spiritual. For the great ceremonies that mark the pivotal events of life, there is a turning away from the light of day to the darkness which releases more readily the wealth of subconscious experience and feeling.

The colours are those loved by the Indian people and used by them constantly to emphasize the message of their great heraldic poles and sacred paraphernalia: red for life, black for death, and blue for the sky. In this canvas they glow with the splendour of a sumptuous Byzantine enamel.



C. MESSAY

The Dark Riders

Like a blood-red flower bursting into bloom from the eruption of its darkened heart, this evocation of war challenges the imagination. It holds validity both as a communication born directly from the inner mind of the artist and as a fantasy woven from the complex threads of mythological and historical reference.

Kinetic in essence, shapes and colours whirl centrifugally outward from the centre of the composition. Bold calligraphy suggests, rather than delimits, the forms of the panoply of war. An encircling array of sharpened stakes surrounds the melee of phalanxed soldiers. Two sinister silhouettes with pikes and banners are found mounted on frenzied horses and leading the charge and counter-charge. A suffocating and claustrophobic atmosphere permeates the scene, enveloped as it is in the flames and smoke of war.

Although black and red predominate in the colour scheme, with some glimmerings of gold and grey here and there, the general effect is that of a monochrome. This derives, no doubt, from the even gradations of colour which traverse the whole scale of intermediate brown and maroon tonalities.

The story of the scriptural battle of Armageddon, which is destined to roll up the old order of society and clear the way for a new world, seems relevant to the Dark Riders. The Book of Revelation describes the four horsemen unleashed by the opening of the great seals as riders mounted on white, red, black, and pale horses, symbolizing the disasters of war, plague, famine, and death. While the horsemen of our painting are not so individualized, they nonetheless imply comparable ferocity and devastation.

There is only a general correspondence between this or any other apocalyptic constellation that comes to mind for the vision is singular and would seem to be illustrative of neither ancient nor modern presentations of the idea.

The accoutrements that have traditionally attended the pageantry of war are all here, but the glamour is gone. Carle, whose personal experience of the reality of war embraced both the Spanish Civil War and service in Europe for the Canadian army during the Second World War, gives us a contemporary interpretation. Through his imagery, he shows the discharge of this evil as from the dark, fear-ridden recesses of the collective unconscious into active, deadly violence.

1971



Xerxes

The theme is drawn from the heroics of warfare, Xerxes the Great was lord of the Medes and Persians, conqueror of Asia, and would-be master of Greece. It is interesting to consider what Carle selected from that epic story for purposes of illustration—not that mighty monarch's crossing of the Hellespont over his bridge of boats, nor his destruction of the Greek resistance at Thermopylae and the subsequent sack of Athens, nor yet his defeat at the naval engagement off Salamis—but the amassing of the vast horde of his army in preparation for the march through Asia Minor.

We see them breaking camp, possibly somewhere in the Mesopotamian desert. The land is scorched to the texture of parchment. An open design of pyramids, lozenges and diamonds suggests an area defined by great tented spaces and awnings, the lightly framed pavilions of an oriental army on manoeuvres. There is an air of excitement through the encampment as the guerdons of war are unfurled. Already the Arabian barbs are on the move beneath a veritable forest of spears.

The technique itself lends excitement. Over a hot yellow-to-orange ochre ground, a vigorously dribbled calligraphic line delineates the tensely drawn figures, thickens into lumps of black, and spreads into cool grey. A reddish wash is freely brushed in here and there, adding substance to the skeletal lines and tying together the forms that would otherwise be too energetically dispersed. Like *The Dark Riders*, the main activity seems to take place within a dynamic oval. Here, however, all is spontaneity and spirit.

It is curious how, in the light of Carle's personal experience as a guerilla fighter in the Spanish Civil War, the mind tends to transpose the scene from the deserts of Mesopotamia to the tawny, dusty plateau of Iberia, and from the troops of the Persian Xerxes to the insurgents of Spain. The powerful suggestion of Spain is felt in the colours red, gold and black, the royal emblazonments of Aragon and Castile. This impression is further conveyed by the configuration of the mounted rider in the foreground, who seems an allusion not so much to the Persian monarch as to Don Quixote mounted upon his raw-boned horse Rosinante, made familiar to us by Daumier in his series of lithographs.

In any case, there is a flavour of the mock heroic and some degree of caricature in Xerxes, but no bitterness.



C. HESSAY / 72

The Great City

The wilderness of nature was a motif very dear to Carle's heart, yet it is illustrative of the diversity of his thematic material and of the scope of his interpretive understanding that he should have chosen the man-made urban wilderness as a subject for this picture.

An extensive wasteland tends to expand in ever-widening mileage on the perimeter of modern industrial cities. Highways and roads like broad ribbons, factories and warehouses, and abattoirs redolent of their carnage all contribute their smokes, smells, acids and fumes to the smothering mantle that smogs the great metropolis.

There is no doubt something both sordid and monstrous in the cancer-like growth around the city, but there is also beauty. In the early years of this century, the "Ash Can" school of American painters abundantly demonstrated that beauty does indeed lie in the eye of the beholder. It is to be found everywhere, not solely in the "aesthetic theme" considered "de rigueur" by an older generation of artists and connoisseurs. City dwellers see this sort of scene every day of their lives and, commonplace though it be, it is here transformed by the eye of the painter into a silvery monochrome.

Down front, defined by the interlocking triangles of the composition, are untidy heaps of rubble probably churned up by yesterday's crew of workmen. And they will be back, banging away with their jackhammers and chunking up old concrete, for the great city is continually being rearranged, pulled down and rebuilt in never-ending metamorphosis.

An arched viaduct, massive and utilitarian, leads from the superhighway into the vital downtown core. We see the bridge in the naked simplicity of its structure, purely functional, yet graceful in its curvatures.

There surely must be some contemporary mystique concerning the modern freeway with its proliferation of cloverleaves and underpasses. It might well be considered the current version of the sacred maze. The postulants must find their way into the heart of the divine "Arcanum," the business centre of the city and, after initiation, make their way out of it again. In ancient times it was a sinister sacrifice enacted within the precincts of the Cretan Minotaur; later, a courtly game played within the labyrinth of clipped hedges featured in renaissance gardens; and now, a commonplace ritual re-enacted every twenty-four hours by the commuter population. They struggle every morning and evening with the tangle of accesses and exits, with traffic lanes, with lights red, amber and green, and with frustrating tie-ups and accidents.

In this rendition, the lethargy of night still holds the world in thrall, and it is too early in the new day for much traffic. Dawn is breaking after a night of cold and rimy frost, revealing a world of crystalline delicacy. And we catch the city at that magic hour, just as the curtain rises and the rite is about to begin.



From Here to Eternity

Immediately following his repatriation to Canada at the close of World War II, Carle came out to the Pacific Coast and took up residence on Passage Island in the Straits of Georgia, and there pursued the quiet life of a fisherman. The view of the vast volcanic cone of Mount Baker commanding the serrated ridge of the Cascade Range to the east must have constituted the dominant feature of his landscape, and this picture is, no doubt, a fairly literal representation of that scene.

The choice of the quiet and peace that island living afforded in those days must have acted as a balm to his spirit, and no doubt enabled him to come to terms with the great distortion of human values that had overwhelmed his life. *From Here to Eternity* can be seen as a commentary on those years, made from the vantage point that time and space had given, but with surprising power of emotion.

Expressionism, the radical transposition of the values and hues of nature in the interests of emotional content is a marked characteristic of German art. It is paradoxical that Carle, in a sense a world citizen, should have retained the aesthetic characteristics of the great painters of his homeland, such as Nolde, Beckmann and Franz Marc. In spite of the transference of his thematic material to a Canadian environment these qualities persisted.

This large painting was initially prepared with an all-over pink ground colour. An overlay of vibrant black and red enamels delineate the rocks and trees, gleaming whites irradiate the inlet, while ultramarine and cobalt blues delicately stipple the mountain slopes. The underlying common hue, reinforced by the intense reds of the foreground gradually transforms itself into the palest of pinks, mauves and roseate tones as it distances away to clothe the mountain heights in the softest mystery of cloud and atmosphere.

Like the setting of Ernest Hemmingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" this work is full of dynamic polarities. Angled horizontals are strongly opposed by the dark prison-like bars of the mutilated trees, so uncompromisingly vertical and much emphasized by repetition. Burnt and blackened ruins, broken crosses, and skull-like boulders dominate the foreground to create a churning motion that emphasizes, by contrast, the serenity of the pyramidal forms of the mountains at the skyline. It is an equation of heaven and hell in simultaneous expression.

Although Carle served in the army as a corporal, and not in the ranks of the official war artists, this picture is, nonetheless, an authentic war record. That this sole surviving member of a platoon which cleared minefields in Europe still had hope and was able to reveal this vision of eternity in the midst of destruction serves to show not only his own generosity of heart but also the resilience that enabled him to recover from exposure to shell-shock.



C. HESSAY / 75

Wilderness Swamp

Wilderness Swamp is a satisfying painting not only in the balance of the elements constituting it as a work of art, but in the pervasive mood which suggests a quiet yet deep understanding of nature. The variety of texture and the subtlety of the subdued colours contribute in a major way to the aesthetic experience. They include the suffused surfaces of the swamp itself, the thinned and heavily built-up greys and blacks of the trees, and the contrasting warmth of the thickly glazed mountain behind. These qualities are structured by a singularly bold and striking composition which features a powerful letter "H" form, also the principal means by which the perspective of the vista is delineated. Within its verticals the darker tonalities are concentrated.

To walk into this picture with its pronounced three-dimensional character is to be halted in one's steps. The sun, not yet fully risen, has cast a rosy flush on the western face of the mountain and sky above, but has not yet penetrated into the depths of the forest, still shadowed in the density of its undergrowth. It is probably late October or early November. During the night a light snow seems to have fallen, powdering the swamp and blanketing the roof of a small building to the right.

There is the impression that nature has "shut down" for the season, that the annual function of ferns and bracken, of fireweed and hardhack, and of all this vegetal exuberance has reached its completion and holds the future in promise only. In spring the new year will call forth the rampant energies of the swamp again. The trees will be clothed in shimmering green, the sweet air will echo with the shrill melodious din of chorusing frogs, mosquitoes will rise in malicious squadrons, the malodorous but brilliant skunk cabbage will flourish, and the uniformed ranks of cattails and reeds will sway under the nervous perching of the scolding blackbirds. For the present, however, everything speaks of the retiring year.

The opening in the forest cuts clear through to the mountain like a surveyor's line. On the right above the repossessing underbrush, the roof suggests an old homestead. Across the foreground are the fallen remains of what might have been a fence, possibly keeping cattle out of the boggy land which fills the central area of the picture. One senses the presence of the masterful but vanished hand of man in his struggle to tame and convert this strong, inhospitable land to his purpose.

It is curious how often Carle places the viewer of his pictures in the midst of an untamed wilderness, whether in a deadfall of snagged roots and tree trunks, in a great depth of snow, in a chaos of fallen rocks or, as in this case, in the centre of a great swamp; uncomfortable for the viewer, perhaps, but never for Carle. He had an uncanny ease and lack of fear within the unaltered environment of nature, and to be immersed in its ambience was for him to be in comfort and security. His attitude towards the more dangerous creatures of the wild, whether they were rattlesnakes or bears, was equally unaffected. "If you don't hurt them, they won't hurt you!" he used to say. "Let them be" would nicely summarize his almost Buddhist attitude to living things. This extraordinary empathy often pervades his work as a deeply poetic and meditative atmosphere. Here it is communicated in the perfect stillness of this early winter morning.



C. H. H. H.

Abandoned Village

An abandoned village is by no means an uncommon scene in the densely forested and mountainous province of British Columbia. Throughout its many wilderness areas, the traveller may come across the decaying remains of ghost towns, old mining and logging camps, ranch buildings, prospectors' shacks and settlers' shanties, all crumbling away and mouldering back into the regenerating humus of the rain forests. Such a village scene must have been a familiar one to Carle, himself an ardent explorer and prospector.

Rising from a tangle of fallen logs and miscellaneous debris is a group of deserted buildings with blank, sightless windows and smokeless chimneys. There is no life anywhere, only the final and absolute quiet of death, soundless and motionless.

A powerful and compelling composition conveys the stark aspect of the scene. An assemblage of criss-crossed angles and pyramidal forms is counterpoised by the sentinel-like verticals standing in two triangulated groups. A commanding "X" or cancellation mark controls the dynamics of the design. In this way the compositional form directly embodies the emotional connotations.

Initially, this canvas seems a literal transcription of a deserted village—that, and nothing more—a brilliantly executed monochrome in varying shades of ochre. Further contemplation, however, reveals far more. A terrible sense of sadness characterizes this abandonment, suggesting the aftermath of a devastatingly destructive agency. In a strange way the many denuded posts bear some resemblance to primitive totem poles, pointing with desperate and heroic gesture to the molten sky. Some similarity of mood to several of Emily Carr's paintings, notably "Blunden Harbour," comes to mind. There, leaning and rotting away, eaten by the many corrosions of the atmosphere, the great heraldic poles of the Indian people constitute a deeply moving valediction on the collapse of the old native culture. And here, too, the valedictory note is struck, but with greater intensity, and with more sweeping desolation. It announces a tragedy of apocalyptic magnitude and power.

One of Carle's characteristics as a painter, one which makes his works so fascinating, was his ability to take the familiar and use it in a symbolic manner to express hidden meaning, an ability which increased and deepened as he grew older. It operates here in the sulphurous atmosphere and glare. A cosmic visitation, as of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Judean hill country, would appear to have overthrown and devastated this simple pioneer village in the western mountains of North America.



Magenta Fire

This is a large and somewhat startling painting, vital enough to dominate a wall or a room. The first and overwhelming impression is that of its intense, highly enamelled colours. Black, the use of which Carle considered his trademark as a painter, is freely applied in a very tactile manner over a dazzling background of magenta and red, varied with splashes of violet, pink, orange and yellow. It demonstrates the power of colour to mesmerize and concentrate the attention. Held within a composition which is sharply angular, a pile of fallen logs, lying like the fingers of a giant, outspreading hand, directs and focuses the lines of vision.

A forest fire at the height of its incandescence is burning on the further bank of a wilderness lake. Behind the scorched and silhouetted trees, the many foci of the conflagration blaze like Roman candles or erupt in flowering rockets of fire as the globular resin explodes in splitting detonation.

The immediate foreground is aglow with hot reflected light that starkly illuminates the curious assemblage of forms scattered over a large outcropping of rocks. To the left are a homesteader's cabin and shed, vacant of window, door ajar, quite derelict. One of the leaning poles is so vast in size as to constitute a veritable fallen giant, a monument from some heroic Paul Bunyan past. There are signs of fences here and there, tumbled down and scattered. Between the cabins and the crazily leaning logs is a curious image scratched into the dark paint, an arrangement of pickets and crosses which reminds one of those tiny graveyards found in the corners of farms of the pioneer era. Pervading this deserted world is a presence of death, of an overturning and loss of what were the simple elements of human life.

Magenta Fire must have been particularly important to Carle since he had placed it over the table in the workshop area of his studio apartment, which was by this time above the Wm. Barron Jr. Chevron Station located across from the Langley Hotel. Its presence could not be ignored or dismissed from the mind; it could even be seen from the street.

Carle was a profoundly intuitive man, though by no means a conventionally religious one. There is at work here a transmutation of energy and meaning—a theophany of light. A supernal presence is felt to radiate from the opening in the blackened forest immediately to the right of the centre of the picture, and there are also other nuclei of effulgent energy, pale pink and mauve in colour. One senses some purging of the spirit through the metaphysical activity of fire, a holocaust from the burnt embers of which the phoenix of renewal will arise.



The Number of Man

Conceived in the spirit of passionate irony, this painting, like the Revelation of St. John the Divine to which it specifically refers, bears the burden of prophecy. It dates from the end of the final decade of Carle's activity as an artist and documents the deepening and darkening of his vision during those years. With forces coming to bear on his personal life that were of an ever more threatening character, his mind turned to the tragic dilemma of mankind. He found thematic material in the Bible pertinent to the power which religionists denominate as the Anti-Christ, and from which he distilled his warning.

Like a complex montage, related in form to the techniques of photography and motion picture, this painting is deliberately obscure but highly evocative in its overtones; and it demands concentrated analysis from the viewer.

There are countless figures of various kinds. Some are ghostly apparitions which suggestively formulate themselves, taking shape from and dissolving back into the general atmosphere. Many of these form a menagerie of grotesque animals which seem to have arisen out of the most awful nightmares—a donkey with the long black evil ears, a coiling serpent, an ogling fish face with eyes that hypnotically follow the viewer, and a grimacing, whiskery cat, to mention only a few—all of them refugees from an evil-laden ark. Other groups are either more or less dreadful in their meaningful insinuation.

In the background appears to be a three-lobed hill—a mockery, perhaps, of the sacred eminence of Tibetan Kailasa, or of Jerusalem, about which the psalmist wrote: "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?" and "Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?" There are dwellers here, too, family groups gathered around their hearths in dimly-lit caves. And there are skulls! A ghostly head, thrown out from the charnel house of the ages as so much refuse! Between the two groups of humanity, the living and the dead, powers of evil are on the march. They seem to surge forward in chaotic, haphazardly grouped cohorts. They move on their destructive course like an exhalation from the underworld of hell.

A polarized position, in both compositional form and symbolic meaning, is given to the harvested skulls and to the Lords of Power, who appear diagonally opposite to them. These two sinister figures are servants of the Evil One; yet they are also earthly lords in their own right, representing those who abuse ecclesiastical and civil authority in the arrogance of overweening pride, bearing down on life. The central figure has a devil's black-bearded face, but he wears the red robes of a cardinal of the church and a gleaming cross, ironically the symbol of man's redemption, upon his breast. The sinister insignia "666" on the mitre crowns his head. To his right is a conquistador-like figure in military casque and metal cuirass, sheltering at once a death's head and a grimacing monkey's face. He holds in front of him the barrel of an exploding gun, the smoke of which rises like incense before the cardinal's figure. This gunman is also labelled "666." The spoilage of the Garden of Eden is re-enacted here, with disturbing overtones of what is yet to come. Central to the imagery of the picture is the cabalistic number itself: "666." In the Bible it is the tattoo, the forehead brand of those who follow the false prophet of the "Latter Days": "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six" (Revelation 13:18). The ancient occult science of gematriya tells us that six is the number of the man and three the number for God. Six tripled therefore is the symbol of the Anti-Christ, the power of man in his selfish pride—destructive, arrogant and cruel—man masquerading as God.

The whole atmosphere is permeated by fire. The red of evil and the black of death are everywhere, and the highlights of yellow are lurid in their intensity, spotlights held upon murder and rapine. We seem to be in the world of medieval visions not unlike those which obsessed the ascetic monk Hieronymus Bosch, the master of representations of perverted and triumphant evil. Like a devastating juggernaut, this portentous array moves towards us, trampling and crushing all in its unchallenged way.



C. NESSAY/77

Break of Day

This picture could quite appropriately be called "Carle's Testament," and that in the most literal sense, for it was, in fact, his last painting. He died from a heart attack that occurred while he was dancing at a New Year's party in the early hours of January 1, 1978, at the Sasquatch Inn in the Fraser Canyon settlement of Spuzzum. This painting was found drying on his long, low painting table, surrounded by all the creative clutter of pigments and brushes.

This wilderness image is pervaded by the spell of a perfect silence. In the hush of the earliest dawn, there is no movement of nature but for the mists which, lifting from the beds of the creeks, gather and disperse against the distant range of mountains. The air is pure and chill, the light clear and colourless.

In the middle distance, growing around a few deserted buildings whose outlines are merely suggested, are the remains of a once great forest, ragged and untidy like the detritus left from a logging operation. Framing the extreme left of the picture are the skeletal trunks of a stand of conifers. In the immediate foreground, jumbled rocks and boulders border a placid alpine lake. Their fractured surfaces appear to be the scarred remains of human activity. There is no doubt some veiled comment intended here on the impact of man on the environment.

In spite of the above-mentioned appearances, which are very secondary, this work is significantly different from the greater part of Carle's later productions. Here there is a radical transformation of most of the compositional, colouristic, and other elements typical of his manner of painting. The mood is one of pure lyricism, rare in his paintings, since he was more inclined to the expression of drama and intensity of feeling. Many of his other works feature a predominance of strongly contrasting shapes and angles; here undulating curves wave successively across the picture from lower to upper register. The mountains are gently rounded in contour, the rhythm of the trees is without aggressive movement, and the tonality displays softer harmony, an absence of violent contrast and of any stifling intensity of colour.

It is possibly coincidental that Carle should have painted this statement of reconciliation, so refreshing in its mood, on the eve of his departure from this life. But it nevertheless stands as his last will and testament for us, and shows forth a cleansed and releasing spirit. The cares and burdens, the deferred hopes and unrealized joys, have been left with the night, which has withdrawn. Before us lies the awakening of a new day, sweetened and purged of all undesirable things.

1977

A Hessay Photo Album



(Top left) Carle's sister Anna, his brother Walter, and Carle.



(Top right) Carle playing chess with his brother Walter.

(Bottom right) John Hemingway and Carle doing floor exercises.





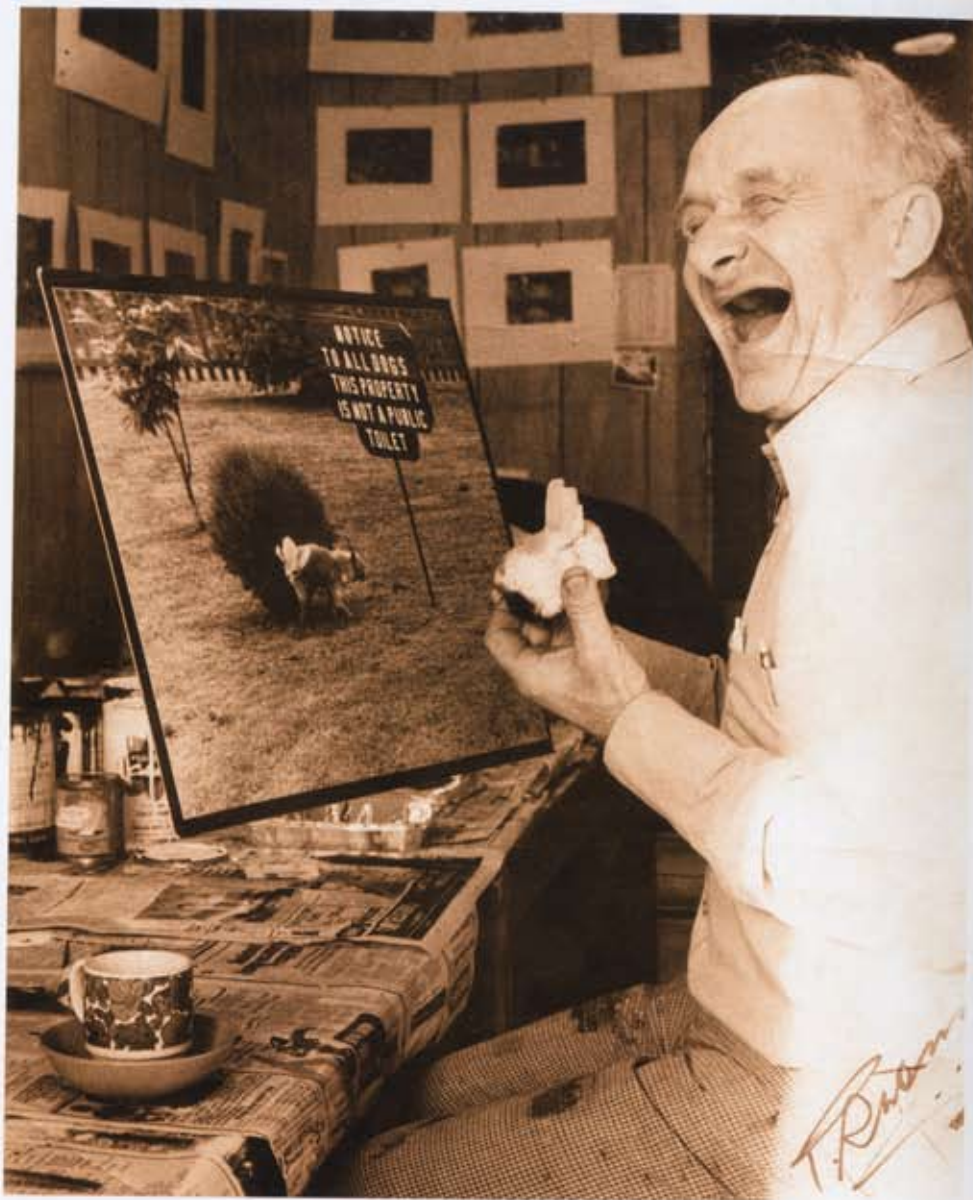
(Top left) Carle clowning in his soldier's uniform.



(Top right and bottom right) Carle on his boat.

(Bottom left) Carle in front of his shanty on Passage Island, British Columbia. This was his first home after World War II.





(Top left) Carle doing a hand stand with his nephew Wally's monkey "Charle".

(Bottom left) Carle panning for gold in the Fraser River.

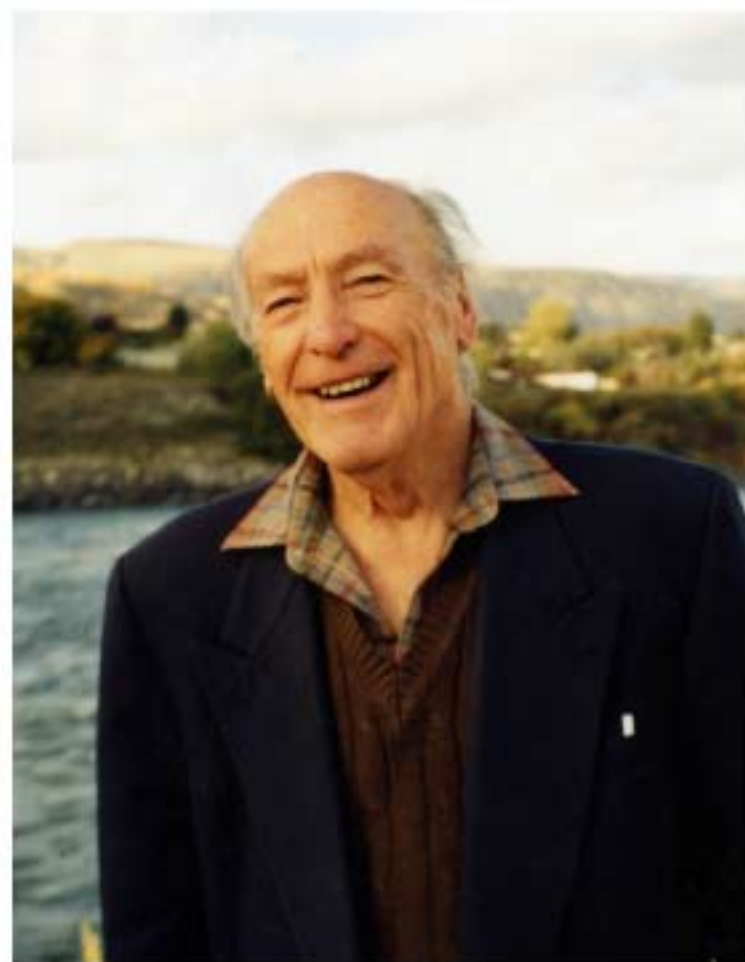
(Right) Pete Swenson's photograph of Carle having fun.

LEONARD A. WOODS brings to his probing analysis of the paintings of Canadian artist CARLE HESSAY his personal knowledge of the man and his own extensive experience as art historian, sculptor, draughtsman, poet, and writer of musical scores. Both men, creative in several artistic disciplines, shared a friendship spanning three decades.

Carle Hessay valued his friend's artistic judgment and was influenced by it in his work. In turn, Leonard Woods observed with delight and amazement as Carle reconstructed himself after his shattering wartime experiences, absorbed the artistic energies that characterized the 1960s, and created the dynamically charged paintings seen in this collection.

The paintings that Leonard has selected for commentary cover the period from the late 1950s to 1977 during which Carle was settled mainly in Langley, British Columbia. Carle's prospecting trips to the mountain wilderness of the interior of the west coast of Canada yielded spiritual restoration as well as pigments and subject matter for his art. Carle's knowledge of color and his masterful brushwork owe much to his early art training in Europe, yet his vision is entirely original and its expression is uniquely Canadian.

Carle's previous experiences as a world traveler, including his participation in the Spanish Civil War and World War II, were transformed and manifested in the form of visual parables that have a surprisingly contemporary resonance in the early twenty-first century.



Leonard A. Woods

CARLE HESSAY

"Inside the exhibition space is the still ringing voice of a man who reached into his soul to understand the world he reached out to embrace....For all their distinct shamanistic, historical and biblical allusions, the themes originate from the same deep well of emotion and restlessness."

(The Vancouver Sun, June, 1980. On a show at the Langley Art Gallery.)

"He is one of the most fascinating men I have ever talked with; and after an hour or two, I left the place exhilarated."

(Ambrose Hills, on a visit to Carle Hessay's studio. Tisdale Recorder, October, 1966)

"Carle's previous experiences as a world traveler, including his participation in the Spanish Civil War and World War II, were transformed and manifested in the form of visual parables that have a surprisingly contemporary resonance in the early twenty-first century."

(Maidie Hilmo)

Canadian artist Carle Hessay was born in Dresden, Germany on November 30, 1911. He received his art training in Europe, including Dresden and Paris. Amidst tragic family circumstances, the Great Depression, and war, Carle's studies were interrupted and he became a seaman and traveled the world. During the 1950s, Carle settled in Langley, British Columbia, where he set up a sign shop to earn his "bread and butter." His creativity flourished and he began to develop his own signature style. He often collected pigments for his paintings during his week-end prospecting trips to the mountainous interior. He loved to play classical music, perform gymnastics, and play chess. His infectious sense of humor and his kindness endeared him to his many friends. While he was dancing at a New Year's Party on January 1, 1978, he died of a heart attack.

LEONARD A. WOODS

Author Leonard Woods was a pupil of Lemoine Fitzgerald, the only prairie representative of the Group of Seven. Concurrent with his studies at the Winnipeg School of Art, Leonard studied sculpture with European-trained Byllee Lang de Marin. By the time Leonard graduated in 1940, war had broken out. Due to a health problem, he was discharged from the Air Force in the summer of 1943, becoming one of the first ex-servicemen to receive rehabilitation training at the Ontario College of Art. After studying under the renowned sculptor, Emanuel Hahn, Leonard graduated in 1945.

Meanwhile, he had been selected to reopen the Sculpture Department at the Vancouver School of Art, a position he held until 1954. He also took over and held the position of Art Historian there until 1969. Leonard's commissioned sculpture includes the dramatic and well-articulated angel musician figures in the St. Andrews-Wesley Church in Vancouver, as well as numerous animal figures done from life studies made at various farms in the Fraser Valley.

Leonard left the Vancouver School of Art in 1969 to settle in his home town of Langley. Leonard's creativity transcends boundaries. He was one of three musicians instrumental in the founding of the Langley Community Music School. During his Langley years, Leonard not only taught but wrote music. In 1991 he completed the score for a two act opera called "Cowboys." Although he is now retired from teaching, Leonard still writes musical scores and poetry.

In the early 1960s Leonard gave a talk at the Rotary Club exhibition of Carle Hessay's work. Then in 1984, Leonard was the principle speaker at the month-long celebration of Carle's art at the Dawson Creek Grain Elevator Gallery. Leonard's long friendship with Carle and his observation of the artist's progress over the years make these commentaries all the more meaningful, relevant, and insightful.