1986

What ever happened to Queen St. West?

Donegan, Rosemary

A History of Art Scenes &

What Ever Happened To QUEEN ST. WEST?

by Rosemary Donegan

"There's this vitality about the Queen St. West scene with its loose ends and experimentation as people try to capture the sentiments of this time and place, and in the best tradition of the arts, it represents a break from the past."

John Sewell
The Globe and Mail
August 27, 1986

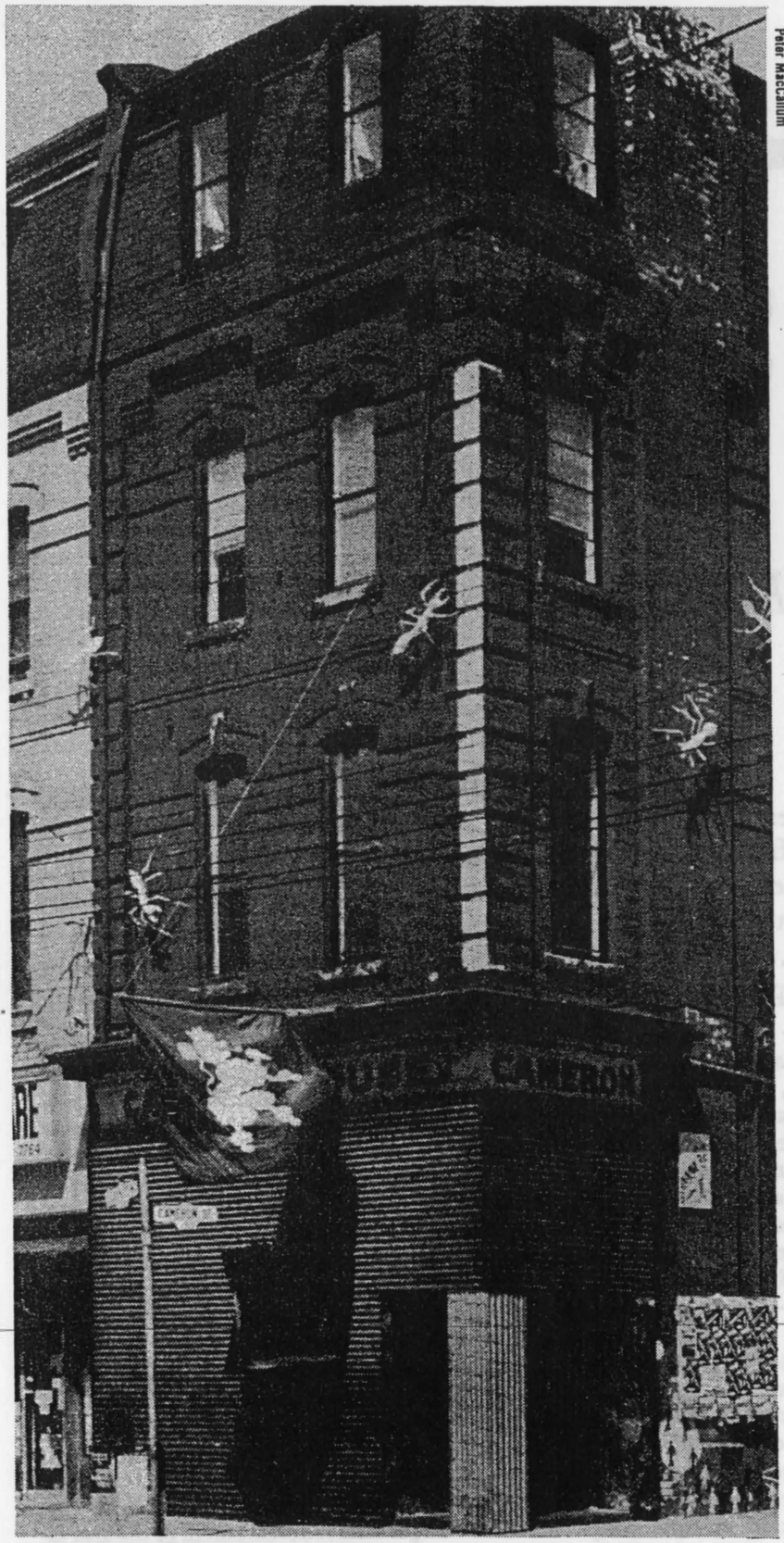
With the coming of age of the Queen St. West scene, Toronto of the 1980's appears to have developed its own official 'art scene,' full of budding artistic potential and style.[1] The scene not only focuses on music and the visual arts, but is also associated with theatre, design, fashion, and the perennial favorites — eating, drinking, and dancing. In recent years, the community has also developed a consciousness of black, feminist, gay and lesbian issues.

While being promoted, eulogized and sarcastically critiqued by local media interests, the implicit assumption is that this is a first, although occasionally Yorkville in the dim-dark past of the 1960s is noted. Meanwhile, the scene is being massaged by local politicians for votes, assaulted by local moralists and the police, and deciphered and number-crunched by the planners; Baumol's theory — that the arts are justified as a creative lost leader for the local restaurant and hotel industry.

The artists and musicians of Queen St. engendered all this attention because over the last 20 years they have developed a network of institutions — galleries, bars, production and distribution co-ops, magazines and restaurants — which responded to their own needs and aesthetic concerns. However, it is the very success of the Queen St. scene that may have already transformed Queen St. into a caricature of itself, another conventional 'lifestyle' commercial venture. This has been accelerated in the last few years as a second wave of more capital intensive businesses — commercial galleries, expensive restaurants and clothing stores — has been established on the street. This phenomena is not limited to Queen West and can be observed in slightly different patterns on Bloor West, the King and Front area, and the Summerhill area.

However, more threatening is the larger scale redevelopment of the area to

Communities in Toronto



Peter MacCallum

Cameron Hotel, 1984

the south, the planned King St. West Communications Plan, which will include the new CBC Headquarters and the growing ubiquitous franchise fernbars surrounding Roy Thomson Hall and Ed Mirvish's Empire, between Simcoe and Peter Streets. All of these developments are directly connected to the Railway Lands, the Domed Stadium and the proposed Spadina LRT. As the focus of the city moves west, the entire area from the Lakeshore to Dundas St., and as far west as Dufferin, is in transition.

Queen St. is also going through a shift determined by the generational aspect of the community, rather than by the crass economics of the real-estate world. The present community could be loosely categorized into three generations, differing in artistic baggage, politics and priorities. The first arrived on Queen St. in the 1960s, a second group in the mid- to late 70s who are now in their 30s, and then a 3rd generation of young artists and students of the 1980s. It is always changing and shifting and is not a singular, homogenous scene; but it is aging. The generation which originated the Queen St. scene is approaching mid-age. Some have children, wages and salaries, and therefore more disposable income, and most are tired of cockroaches. The semi-public lifestyle in bars and after hours clubs has its limitations when you're coming up to 40. Their departure as residential tenants from the neighbourhood is having an immediate effect on the daily interaction and public life on the street and the area.

The artist/musicians and their cohorts — people who have worked and lived in the area for a number of years — are quite conscious of this process. Indeed, they are hardly able to ignore it. They grumble about escalating rents, tourists, teeny-boppers and up-towners taking over their local hang-outs. There is much lamenting for the way it used to be; the authenticity and originality of which are never clearly defined. Yet there is an implicit unspoken understanding of a community and its meaning.

This is the second in a series of investigative articles. Rosemary Donegan looks at the gentrification of Queen Street West juxtaposed against the rise and fall of various arts communities in Toronto from the end of the 19th century to the 1980s.

Chris Reed

Shoppers on Queen St. West, 1986. The corner of Queen St. & Soho St. Wall murals by Barbara Klunder (above) and RUNT (street level)

This idea of community exists in the local historical mythology, although it is dependent upon who you talk to, and when they arrived in the area. Factually it can be traced through primary source material archived in the artist-run centres. It is specifically these artist-run non-profit institutions (and many small business ventures) which have been forced to relocate (some twice) in the last 5 years, due to local real-estate pressures and a range of cutbacks in Federal arts funding. In trying to understand the present process underway on Queen St., it is necessary to look at the street in a broader context to get beyond the inflated media hype and the impending doom of gentrification.

First, as a geographic community in the city, it needs to be placed in an historical perspective, as it is not the first arts community in Toronto, nor will it be the last. An artist's life in general has two important geographic focuses: the public gathering point and the point of production. The former includes galleries, bars, restaurants; the latter is the place where as independent producers they work — the studio, both electronic and easel.

The first geographic focus of the Toronto arts community in the late 19th century was the Bohemia of the Adelaide / Yonge St. area, the heyday of the art clubs, societies and the private studios of Toronto the Good; in the 1920s and 1930s this continued in the studios and galleries of Grenville St. and the folksy Bohemia of the Gerrard Village in the 1940s; to the first flings of the local beats in the 1950s; and the intensity of the 1960s in the Yonge / Bloor / Yorkville area; this eventually moves south down Spadina and Beverley St. to Queen in the 1970s with expansion continuing to the south and as far west as Dufferin in the 1980s.

Second, to examine the reality and difference between an 'arts community': which is a process and product of people, work and ideas; and an 'arts scene': which is a phenomena engendered by the media, the art market and the real-estate boom.

Defining an Arts Community

The development of physical communities / neighbourhoods is part of the process of coming to terms with the confusion and complexity of urban life. People congregate around and develop their own mental maps of the city based on what are important locations for them as individuals.

In the city, one of the primary delineations of an arts community is its geography and physical location. Its location is defined by the larger urban economic framework and by real-estate values, core suburb pressures, the role of the civic government, the market factors affecting the creative-cultural service industries, and the specific age and architecture of the neighbourhood.

The production of the visual arts, especially traditional painting, sculpture, photography, is usually regarded as a private activity... the individual creative act. What is unusual about the 1970s and 1980s, specifically in the Queen St. area, is the development of co-operative spaces, workshops, audio-visual studios and performance spaces. These production, exhibition and distribution centres are more than work spaces, but are in fact points at which the community of artists can meet, exchange valuable information, make production contacts, or socialize. Both the traditional visual arts and the newer related fields of video, performance, and audio art require a public social context, within which the implica-

Peter MacCallum

Early Queen St. Types, Phoebe St. Schoolyard (behind Queen St.), 1975. L to R: Peter MacCallum, Robert Roy, Peter Blendell, Ann Whitlock, John Dennison

tions of the work... its quality, significance, economic value... are established. It is the response by the public and one's own peer group that defines one as an 'artist' or as a 'musician,' and as a member of the 'community.'

Obviously, the essential element within the 'arts community' is the producers — the visual artists, musicians, designers, and artisans. This is over-laid with the inter-related services. On the one hand, there is the intellectual and economic infrastructure of the art world: the curators, critics, dealers, magazines, and managers. On the other hand, there are the technical services: the copy shops, hardware stores, film laboratories, sound studios, the stat house, typesetters and printers. Finally there is a whole range of associated bookstores, antique shops, street pedlars, second-hand clothing stores, design shops, restaurants and bars. All of these elements together form a geographic locale identifiable as an art scene.

Another pattern contains a much more amorphous and mythological element; the community as a network of information/interests which involves a high degree of self-recognition. Artists' reputations are part of both the creation and the consequence of the local community. Internal recognition, based partly on estimations of potential in the younger artists, begins the process of establishing individual credibility — which in turn helps to recreate the ongoing reality of an 'arts community.' This element of 'potential' is part of the developed consciousness of the contemporary artist's role, as the artist's lifestyle always has the possibility of becoming part of his/her status as an artist and experimentalist.

For the established artists in the community in their thirties and forties, reputations, seeded through an early peer and self-recognition phase, are now based firmly on a large body of work made visible through exhibition, the media, by recognition extended through the peer jury system developed at Canada Council and adopted by provincial arts councils, and finally through international recognition and exhibitions.

Within this community, a series of value judgements and successes/failures, takes place both in public — in the magazines, exhibitions, performances, screenings, lectures and discussions — and in private — in the bars, at parties, at home. It is the over-lapping of this complicated infrastructure and artistic ideological framework that defines the cultural and social power of the arts community.

To recognize the phenomena of a community or a scene externally, necessitates an ability to 'read' its signs, codes and meanings. It requires a certain amount of specific information and/or pre-conceived assumptions of who's who — what's where — and what the interrelationships are.

Queen Street's Success

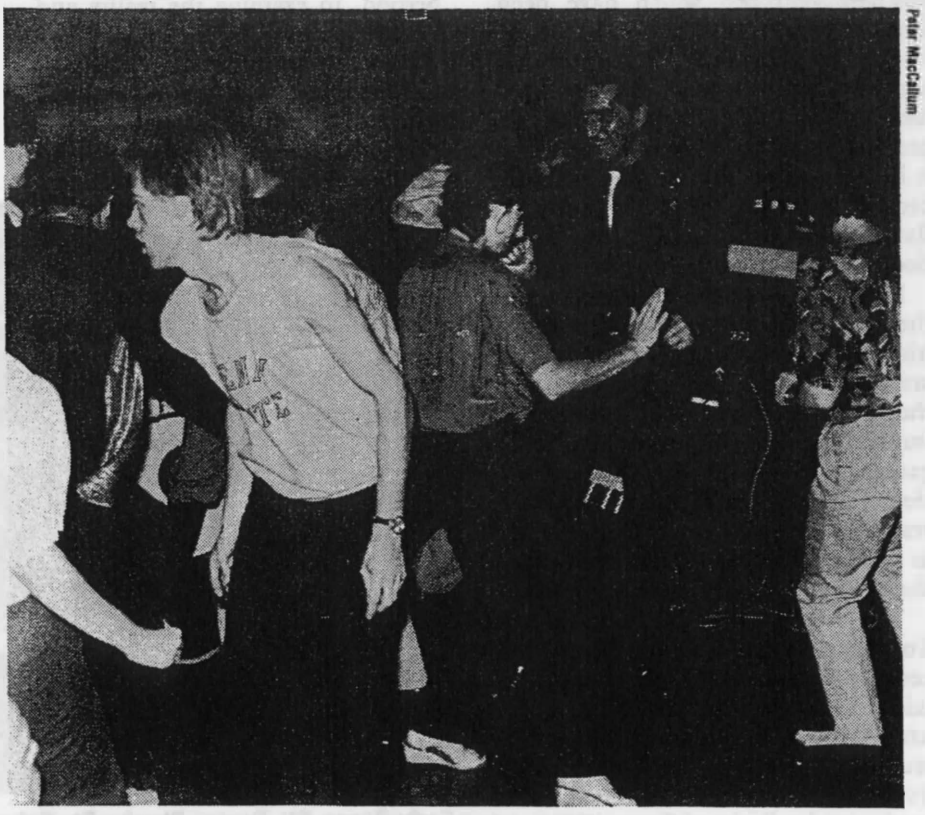
Queen Street is a centre of cultural activity due to a complex inter-relationship of economics, ideas and physical-geographic location.

The basic 19th century architecture of the two and three story store-fronts and houses maintains a consistent wall to the street. In summer the relationship between the store fronts and the trees creates a sidewalk canopy that shelters the sidewalk and defines the street. The surrounding streets are integrated into Queen, but due to the slowness of the streetcar, fast-moving traffic tends to avoid the street. This traffic passes through the area on adjacent Adelaide, Richmond and Spadina.

The scale of the streetscape from Beverley to Spadina Ave., especially the extra widening from east of Soho Street to Spadina, was part of the original plan as laid out by William Baldwin in the 1820s when he designed Spadina Ave. north from Queen St. (then known as Lot St.) to the house on the hill, Spadina. The increased width of the sidewalks gives the street a focus, which differentiates it from the norm in Toronto's grid pattern.

The commercial and residential composition of Queen St. hasn't really changed that much since the mid-19th century. It has seen a fairly cyclical pattern of working class immigrant communities, starting with the Irish, the Finns, the Jewish community on Spadina, the Black district south of Queen out to Bathurst, and the post-World War II Eastern Europeans. In the 1960s, Queen St. contained a mixture of small stores, often run by Eastern Europeans, light industrial supply shops, bars and greasy spoons.

Tavern-hotels such as the Black Bull — opened first in the 1850s — or the Cameron House — built in the mid 1890s — and the Horseshoe Tavern — known for its country and western music — were well established and had a com-



Peter MacCallum

Twist Contest, Cabana Room, Spadina Hotel, 1979

mitted, although not wealthy, clientele. It was not a slum, although the houses and stores were up to 150 years old, and the area had never attracted the 19th century wealth and grandeur of Jarvis and Sherbourne.

What attracted the artists, musicians and their cohorts to the area in the mid 1960s was that it was cheap and central. It had photography labs, typesetters, copy shops, generous studio space in loft buildings, and an accessible transit system. It had a few inexpensive bars like the Beverley, the Horseshoe, and later the Spadina Hotel, where the music policies attracted groups of young musicians fleeing Scarborough and Etobicoke. The area was close to the Ontario College of Art, and many of the students were already housed in the area. The AGO, although only a few blocks away, was not of major importance to the networking of artists in the area. One of the landmarks of the area was the Ryerson Building, a formal Gothic castle commanding the corner of John and Queen. Once the home of Ryerson Press, and later Trinity Square Video, A Space, the Immigrant Women's Skills Centre, and FUSE magazine, the building is now in the hands of CITY-TV.

The Baldwin St. area had developed in the late 1960s, when an influx of students from OAC, young out-of-town artists from the regions and Quebec, along with US draftdodgers and entrepreneurs converged on the street because of cheap rents. It was a shabby block with two rag merchants, several craft shops, and the Baldwin Street Photography Gallery. This small street was significant for artists in the area, as was Kensington, and the apartment studios on Spadina.

Artists and musicians were originally able to enter the area on their own terms. In the somewhat anonymous quality of the area they didn't create much of a stir. They rarely displaced former residents as they tended to occupy non-residential space. As well, apart from a few enclaves like Alexandra Park and the Niagara Housing Project, an unusual number of the local working class homes were owner occupied, which did mediate and slow the process. However, the pressure began to increase in the early 1980s and continues, especially west of Bathurst St., as bars, old shops, and restaurants are snapped up as soon as they come on the market.

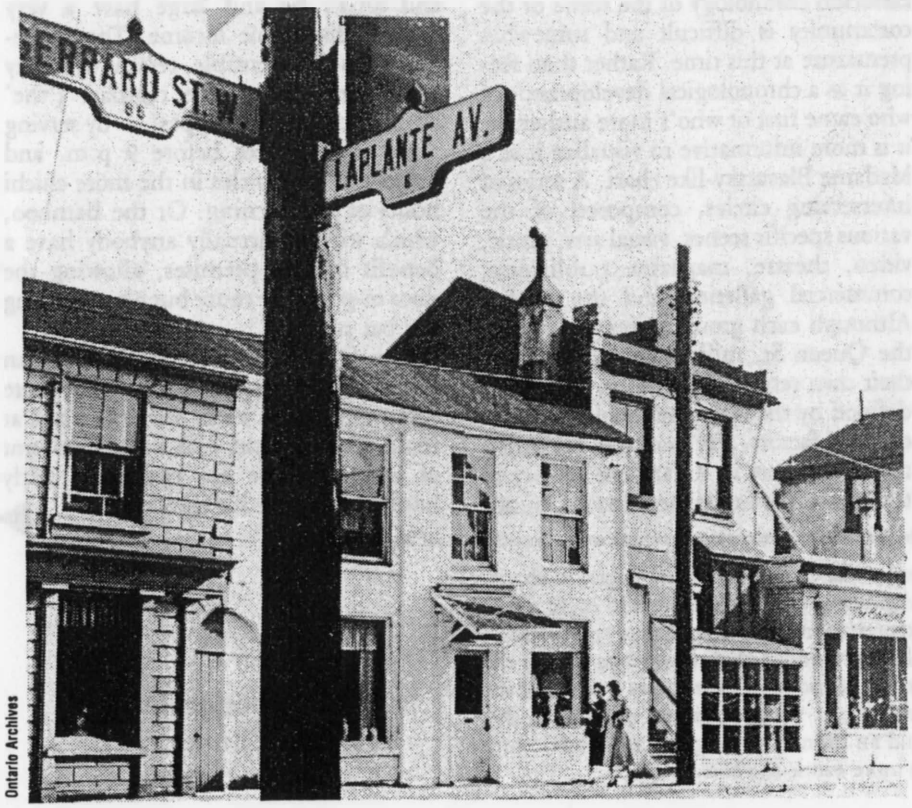
The Gerrard Street Village

There are remarkable similarities between the present Queen St. area and the Gerrard St. Village, that developed in the 1930s, as geographic phenomena within the city. What came to be known as the Gerrard Village refers loosely to the area west of Bay St. to Chestnut St. and included LaPlante, Hayter and Elizabeth Sts. Originally part of The Ward, by the 1930s the area was very mixed, with a residue of the earlier Jewish and Italian communities and a small and culturally isolated male Chinese community, to the south on Dundas and Elizabeth Sts.[2]

Metro Reference Library

The Gerrard St. Village was not a single community, it was rather a geographic, business and social phenomena, that involved a series of interlocking communities of visual artists, dressmakers/milliners, jewellers, potters, antique and book shops and a few specialty gift shops, which extended over a period of 40 years from the 1920s, through the Depression, World War II up to the early 1960s. Similar to Queen St., the attraction of the area was the centrality and cheapness of the rents. As late as the 1960s, the shop rents were often less than $100/month, compared to $300-$400 in Yorkville. The housing stock consisted of one and two-story stucco frame houses, built anywhere between 1820 and 1850, which were in serious disrepair. The Gerrard area was not prime real-estate investment in the 1920s and 1930s.

What the area did have was a number of public social gathering points, which was unusual for 'Orange Toronto.'



Ontario Archives

(Above) Rudy Renzius Studio, Gerrard St. West, 1934. A woodcut by W.F. Godfrey

(Left) Gerrard St. West & LaPlante Ave., 1940s.

There were places like Angelo's with its Italian food, red-checked tablecloths and bottles available on the second floor, if you were discrete; or Mary John's, 'the' social centre of the Village, where multi-varnished travel posters covered the walls, known for its butter tarts, and the fact that Albert Holmes would hand-deliver meals on a tray in the neighbourhood. Everybody from the Group of Seven, Steven Leacock, Ernest Hemingway to doctors from the nearby hospitals hung out there. There were a number of blind-pigs in the area and bootleggers, like Sam, the Italian, at the corner store at LaPlante and Gerrard. The Little Denmark on Bay St. was famous for its breakfasts and cleanliness. It is the public places and popular stories which are synonymous with the Gerrard St. Village, and identified it to both the Village residents and the rest of the city.[3]

The Idea of Bohemia

Identifying it as 'the Village' was common. Toronto artists drew their models and ideas about being an artist from the international metropoles. Montparnasse, Soho, Bloomsbury, Greenwich Village, the East Village; these 'villages' kept alive a model and public concept of the 'artist.' Principally Parisian in origin, the nineteenth century concept of the 'Bohemian' artist originated in and is modelled on the Montparnasse of the Impressionists and their experience and interpretation of Haussmann's Paris.[4] In the 1930s, New York's Greenwich Village would become another model, which by the 1950s had become the alter-ego and primary artistic tension for Toronto artists.

All of this has a marked similarity to the fairly recent kerfuffle with some elements of the Queen St. Business Association, which were pushing the name Soho as an identification of the specific Queen St. area where the sidewalk and street widens. Another group of local businesses and artists fought back to stop the obsequious colonial reference to New York. Yet the irony of the situation was that there is a little street which crosses Queen St., which is called Soho Square and always has been. It was named after the London district Soho, the 19th century Bohemian hang-out.

The Scene and/or the Community

It is through the media process that the Queen St. artists and musicians have become a marketable product — a commodity. This packaging and self-conscious selling of the artists within the media is a recognition, albeit a very limited recognition, of the artist's power as a cultural and intellectual sign-post. In analyzing this process, the object is not to locate and label the artists who have sold out. The artists haven't sold out! In reality there are very few people buying. On the other hand, the artists has been sold as an idea, a lifestyle, a scene. Artists and musicians will not reap the profits from the situation; few own property in the neighbourhood. Rents are going up and good cheap places are impossible to find. It is property that is selling like hot cakes — not paintings, records, sculpture, videos or magazines.

Attempting to arrive at a definitive historical chronology of the scene or the community is difficult and somewhat premature at this time. Rather than seeing it as a chronological development of who came first or who's more authentic, it is more informative to visualize it as a Madame Blavatsky-like chart. A series of intersecting circles, composed of the various specific scenes, visual arts, music, video, theatre, magazine publishing, commercial galleries, and the media. Although each group is inter-related in the Queen St. milieu, they operate on their own terms of reference, which are defined by the larger national and international factors. (For example, the union rate for cutters in a garment factory or the amount of funds the Canada Council dispenses from Ottawa to Toronto parallel galleries.)

A fair number of Queen's early businesses developed from the fringes of the music and art communities, begun by ex-art students and ex-actors turned dealers, musicians turned bootleggers, and staffed by video producers and out-of-work dancers. In turn, some businesses have been able to maintain a commercial interest and a personal commitment to support and make space for local artists and their issues. Events like the Women's Cultural Building Festival; the recent Anti-Apartheid Pub Crawl, the Pages Anti-Censorship case; and exhibitions like Monumenta and the New City of Sculpture, are the public 'spectacles' of this inter-relationship and arts scene.

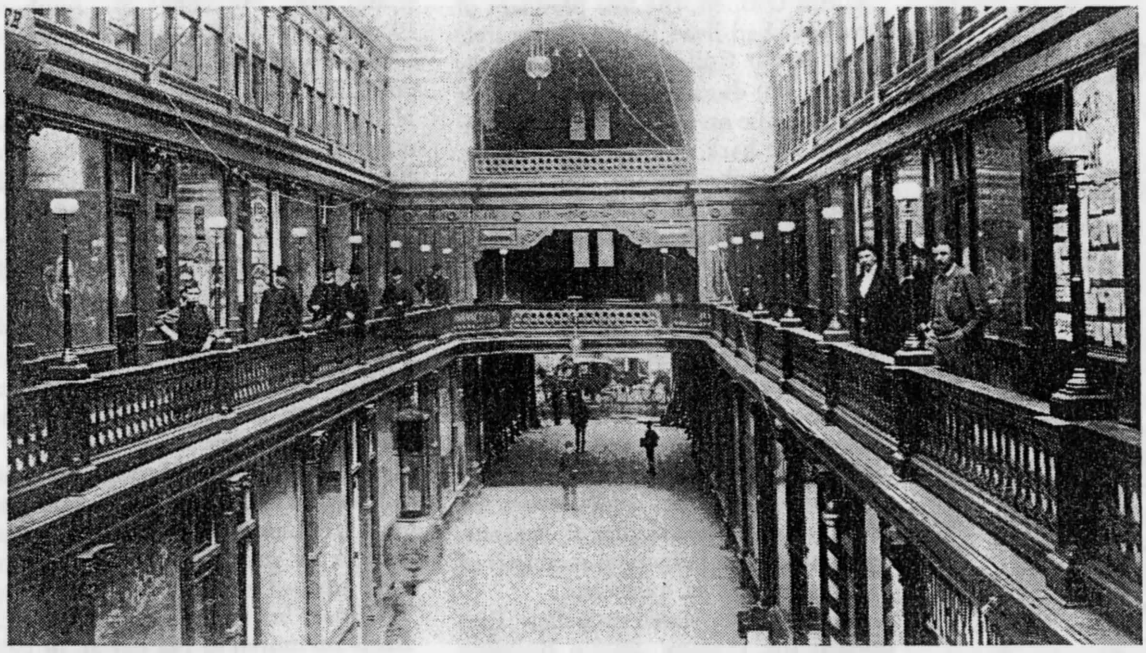
A strong identifying mark of Queen St. in the 60s and 70s was the style of the bars, restaurants and shops. The rule of thumb had been: Don't over-renovate, let the design evolve, maintain the historical context, add a few artistic touches. But with the coming of the 'scene,' 'chic' defined itself in over-designed stores that arrogantly deny the local context.

Some older businesses have been astute in their dealings with the arts community. They have had to solve the problem of how to cater to artists, their tastes, friends and their need for jobs, while maintaining a basic cash flow... and artists by and large have a very limited disposable income. The Cameron House for example, retains their day time clientele — the regulars ('the' authentic Queen St. types) — by serving draft at set prices before 9 p.m. and limits sales to bottles in the more chichi hours of the evening. Or the Bamboo, which will let virtually anybody have a benefit on the premises, allowing the door to go to the cause but always taking the bar profits.

The Queen St. business scene has an innate sense of opportunity. They were smart enough to be in the right place at the right time; and with a small amount of capital, some are making a fairly handsome profit for their work. ▶

"At this moment the physiognomy of the Romanische Café began to change. The "artists" withdrew into the background, to become more and more a part of the furniture, while the bourgeois, represented by stock-exchange speculators, managers, film and theatre agents, literary-minded clerks, began to occupy the place — as a place of relaxation. For one of the most elementary and indispensable diversions of the citizen of a great metropolis, wedged, day in, day out, in the structure of his office and family amid an infinitely variegated social environment, is to plunge into another world, the more exotic the better."

Walter Benjamin
A Berlin Chronicle
1932



Metro Reference Library

The Toronto Arcade, located on the east side of Yonge St. (note carriages seen through the open walkway) c. 1885, Artists studios were on the 3rd floor.

Bohemia at Adelaide and Yonge Streets

Located east of Yonge, on Adelaide, King and Toronto Sts., were the favourite restaurants, exhibition rooms, clubs and studios of the visual artists, writers, architects and bon vivants of the Bohemian set of the 1880s and 90s. By 1885, Toronto St. and the immediate vicinity was the location of Toronto's architects, with the visual artists' studios being located on the 2nd and 3rd floors of buildings on King, Adelaide, Victoria and Toronto Sts.[5]

From its opening in 1888, the Toronto Arcade at 131-139 Yonge St. between Adelaide and Richmond, running east to Victoria St., had as tenants a n mber of established artists: George Reic , Sidney Strickland Tully, William Cruikshank, Mary Wrinch, Edmund Morris. The central passage was 3-1/2 storeys high with a peaked glass roof which provided natural light to the studios on the 3rd floor (a precursor to the Eaton's Centre). At street level were 24 shops, with offices on the 2nd floor, reached by an open balcony on the central passage way. The arcade with its elegant light-filled interior public walkway was a showpiece of the city.[6]

Documentary evidence indicates that artists who could afford studios often occupied the same space for 10-20 years. In the 1980s, the average length of occupation of studios is 3-5 years. Rents, at the turn of the century were in the range of $5.00 per month for a 2nd or 3rd floor room. Although the vast majority of names listed as artists are male, there is a continual presence of women who had their own studios (10-20%).

One of the major attractions at 39 King St. East would have been Notman & Fraser Photographers (on the present site of the King Edward Hotel). It was an important employer, having a sizeable staff of artists who touched up black and white photos, painted backgrounds for portraits and group montages, and hand-tinted coloured photographs. Both mature artists, full-fledged Society members, and young apprentices would work labouriously retouching negatives and colouring photographs.[7] Notman & Fraser's, Grip Ltd., and art goods shops such as Art Metropole, at 131 Yonge St., Matthews & Brothers, 95 Yonge St. and Robert & Son (a direct antecedent of the present Roberts Gallery on Yonge St.) at 79 King St. West would sell artists supplies and occasionally exhibit original art work, but the number of exhibition outlets was severely limited.

The Clubs and Societies

In the late 19th century, professional recognition as an artist was defined by one's membership in art clubs and societies — where the public role of the artist was played out. From a contemporary perspective, they seem like rather odd men's clubs masquerading as formal organizations.

Most clubs/societies of the period had a strong 'Bohemian' tone to their activities and antics, and in a day-to-day manner were informal fraternal organizations. It is important to understand their role as artist-originated and self-determined organizations — which had formalized internal democratic structures based on hierarchical peer judgement. They were simultaneously middle-class in their aspirations, and tied into a professional system of recognition and rewards among their peers. There are remarkable similarities between both the art clubs of the 1890s and the parallel gallery system of the 1980s, and the juried society exhibition and the present peer jury system of the arts councils.

The only major exhibition outlets were the yearly Royal Canadian Academy (RCA) and the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) exhibitions. Based on similar British societies, the OSA began in 1873 and held its first exhibition at Notman & Fraser's on King St. East.[8] The RCA was officially started by the Marquis of Lorne, Governor-General and Queen Victoria's son-in-law, to foster the arts and establish a National Gallery.[9] The annual exhibition, held in the major centres of Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, were juried by members, and anywhere from 300-500 paintings would be hung corner-to-corner, three to four deep on a wall.

As the societies were virtually the only outlets for exhibition work, their power and their structuring role within the arts community can't be underestimated.

However, it was through locally organized art clubs that artists came together regularly to work, discuss and socialize. The clubs were the artistic and social focus for the younger artists, who could not afford a private studio and were not full-time artists.

The Toronto Art Students League was started in 1886 by a group of graphic artists who wanted to draw directly from the live model. The League held exhibitions and published a yearly calendar illustrated by its members. The first meetings were held at 56 King St. East and later rooms were obtained just to the south on Leader Lane and Wellington St. West. The League's most important function was as an informal network of artists who met monthly to submit compositions for 'friendly discussion and criticism;' afterwards the Club would spend the rest of the evening in relaxation and good cheer.

Across from the Toronto Public Library at Adelaide and Church, the Mahlstick Club appears to have been slightly more energetic and jocular in its activities. It provided drawing from the model — nude or costumed — three nights a week, with a composition class on Saturday evenings. The Saturday classes were followed by a sing-song and then an assault-at-arms with boxing, fencing, singlesticks![10] The club seemed to die a natural death around 1903 (perhaps from injuries suffered in club events?) and re-emerges in combination with members of the original Art Students League, as the Graphic Arts Club. The Graphic Arts Club had studio space on Victoria St. and subsequently in the Toronto Arcade. A somewhat similar sketch club, the Little Billie, met at 27-29 King St. West in the 'Bohemian' precincts of McConkey's Palm Room and would have their meals sent up to them.

Galleries

It was not until the 1920s that Toronto would start to develop exhibition outlets outside the societies — and not until the 1940s when private galleries would start to play a major role in the production of exhibitions.

By the late 1920s Grenville St. was the nucleus of artists' studios in the city. Running for 2 short blocks west from Yonge St. to Elizabeth St., north of College St., the street is now dominated by Women's College Hospital and various government office buildings, including the Ontario Archives.

Lucius O'Brien, the first president of the RCA, had lived in the Tudor style house at 20 College West (presently boarded up) during the 1880s-1890s. It was this house on College, with an addition on the back at 23-27 Grenville St. that became the Jenkins' Art Gallery. Jenkins' (which still stands on Grenville St.) advertised itself as "Palatial Antique and Art Galleries, specializing in old English furniture and pictures by old and modern masters." The rather sumptious gallery space showed primarily local private collections, occasionally exhibiting more established Canadian artists, such as Homer Watson and J.W. Beatty (artists who pre-date the Group of Seven era). Malloney's Art Gallery, down the street in a converted duplex at 66 Grenville, was where individual members of the Group of Seven exhibited.

When Jenkins' closed the gallery, they opened the Jenkins' Studio Building across the street at 18-22. It is during the 1930s and 40s that the street would become known and identified with painters like Fred Varley, Yvonne McKague, Marion Long, Manly MacDonald and the sculptor Don Stewart and photographer John Steele. There was the Hayden Street or "Studio Group," artists like Barker Fairley, Aba Bayefsky, Isabelle Reid, John Hall, who rented a communal studio space off Yonge St., south of Bloor St. from 1938-1943. There was also Douglas Duncan's Picture Loan Society on Charles St., which showed David Milne, Paraskeva Clark and most members of the Canadian Group of Painters in the 1930s and 40s. The small literary magazine *Here and Now* published out of 76 Grenville for a few years in the late 1940s. It worked with writers like Ethel Wilson, James Reaney and P.K. Page and felt it had "achieved success at great sacrifice on the part of a small group of people responsible for its production" (a familiar refrain in any alternative magazine in Canada).

There were always framing shops and craft studios in the Gerrard Village area, but it is not until the 1950s that an actual network of galleries appeared. Avrom Isaacs opened his first framing shop at 77 Hayter St. in 1950: the Greenwich Art Shop moved to 742 Bay St. in 1956 and continues today at 832 Yonge St., as the Isaacs Gallery. The gallery was and still is integrally connected with the second generation of Toronto abstractionists: Gordon Rayner, Dennis Burton, Joyce Wieland, Michael Snow and Graham Coughtry.[11] The Greenwich was known for its backroom jazz sessions: it was the first home of the Artists' Jazz Band, and the Contact Reading Series,

Peter MacCallum

Jenkins Antique and Art Galleries, Grenville St. presently being re-developed as a condominium

organized by Raymond Souster, a local poet.

In 1956 Barry Kerneman opened the Gallery of Contemporary Art, on Gerrard, which showed the work of Allan Fleming, Kazuo Nakamura, Robert Hedrick and Tom Hodgson. Gradually the galleries moved to the Bloor/Yonge area. Dorothy Cameron opened the Here and Now gallery, an important early sculpture gallery on Yorkville and later Yonge St.; it was forced out of business by obscenity charges, not dissimilar to the recent charges against Pages Bookstore. The location was taken over by Carmen Lamana, who had previously had a framing shop in the area.

What is important and different in the development of the Queen St. gallery scene is that it was created and established by the artists. The artist-run spaces (now formally institutionalized as parallel galleries) developed in the early 1970s: A Space, Open Studio, Trinity Square Video, CEAC, Art Metropole, the Music Gallery, and later Gallery 76 (OCA funded), YYZ, Chromozone, Mercer Union, ARC. Some similarities between the non-profit artist-run spaces of the 80s and the late 19th century art societies are worth noting. They came together for reasons of exhibition space, art school experience, stylistic ideas, political groupings, production needs, and friendship.

It was with the arrival of the commercial galleries that the area took on official status as the art 'scene.' Some of these new galleries, like Ydessa's, S.L. Simpson and David Bellman, were started by dealers with private backers and family money. The second phase of this change arrived with the centralization of established galleries at 80 Spadina; a number of these had moved south from Yorkville. Arrival of these commercial galleries, increased notice from the public media, and suddenly Queen St. was a major centre of the art market, not just in Toronto, but nationally.

One of the attractions for the galleries and studios was the number of light-industrial loft buildings in the area — the scale of the interior space, high ceilings, natural light — made available for appropriation by a weak and deteriorating garment industry. Codified by New York's Soho and East Village, the present taste for large industrial scale exhibition space is partially connected to a nostalgia for a rapidly passing industrial age and an intellectual attraction to the concept of inhabiting abandoned architecture (a common continental European phenomena).

The E.P. Taylor Reference Library, AGO, Gift of Gordon Conn, 1969

Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles in her studio she shared with her husband Farquhar McGillivray Knowles, Toronto, 1900s.

The Studio

It is interesting to look at the role of the studio as an historical phenomena and more specifically as a work site. Traditionally, the studio was where the process of artistic creation took place and therefore it assumed a metaphoric significance in the iconography of the visual artist's lifestyle. This can be seen clearly in documentary photographs of the period which portray the self-conscious interaction of the artist's ideas, traditions and economic realities. Turn of the century studio photographs are not casual snapshots of the artist at work, but posed ceremonial images, encoded with all the symbols of the 'Bohemian' artist. Formal in tone, they are about bourgeois display and stage setting, which is acted out in the exotica of the Middle East and the Orient — Persian carpets, draperies and so on. From a contemporary perspective the deliberate use of these photographs as ceremonial images makes a fascinating contrast to the chaotic mayhem of 1950s abstract expressionists' studios or the cool immaculate asceticism of the formalists' or experimentalists' studios of the 80s.

Two studios from this era are still standing — the Studio Building and 'the Church.' The Studio Building at 25 Severn St., on the edge of the Rosedale Valley Ravine (immediately to the east as the Yonge St. subway emerges from the tunnel north of Bloor St.) is intertwined with the early story of the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson and their patron Dr. MacCallum. The building was conceived on a non-profit basis with 3/13 of the original financing from Dr. MacCallum and 10/13th from Lawren S. Harris, heir to the Harris family fortune from the Massey-Harris farm implement company.

Designed by Eden Smith and opened in 1914, the simple three story loft building still sits in its park setting. The invididual studios constructed under Harris' supervision, contain a large studio space, a bedroom, kitchenette and bathroom, with a high ceiling; a large expanse of windows, and a large brick fireplace. Some of the early tenants were: A.Y. Jackson and Tom Thomson, who shared a studio; Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, J.W. Beatty, A. Heming, Marion Long, Curtis Williamson and Yulia Biriukova. Tom Thomson, who had moved into the building with a subsidy from Dr. MacCallum, later moved to a small carpenter's shack behind the building. The building was well known as a privileged site within the artists' community and much coveted as a work space.

The other studio that was to become a major social and artistic centre in the city was fondly known as 'the Church' and was the home and workplace of the sculptors Frances Loring and Florence Wyle. They met in 1910 at the Chicago Art In-

stitute, moved to Toronto in 1912-13, and worked in a studio on Church in the Adelaide/Yonge area, until they moved to the church schoolhouse at 110 Glenrose Ave. (near St. Clair and Mount Pleasant Ave.) in 1920. "The Girls," as they were known, were no doubt lovers; although they never took a public stand, their response to local gossip and innuendo was "you can't go through life worrying about what the public is going to think."[13]

The Church was the scene of many Saturday night gatherings for friends, musicians, local artists, the Group of Seven and visiting dignitaries, like Emma Goldman and Robert Flaherty, the filmmaker. While neither the Studio Building or Wychwood Park played a visible social role in the community, 'the Girl's' studio was well-known as a Bohemian milieu and centre for parties and gatherings, for artists, their friends and their children.

One of the most fascinating patterns that emerges from looking at the historical photographs and documents of the period (circa 1900 around Adelaide and Yonge St., the Gerrard Village of the 1930s and 40s, the Queen St. scene of the 1970s and 80s) is the subtle, but noticeable, shift in class identification and economics of the artist.

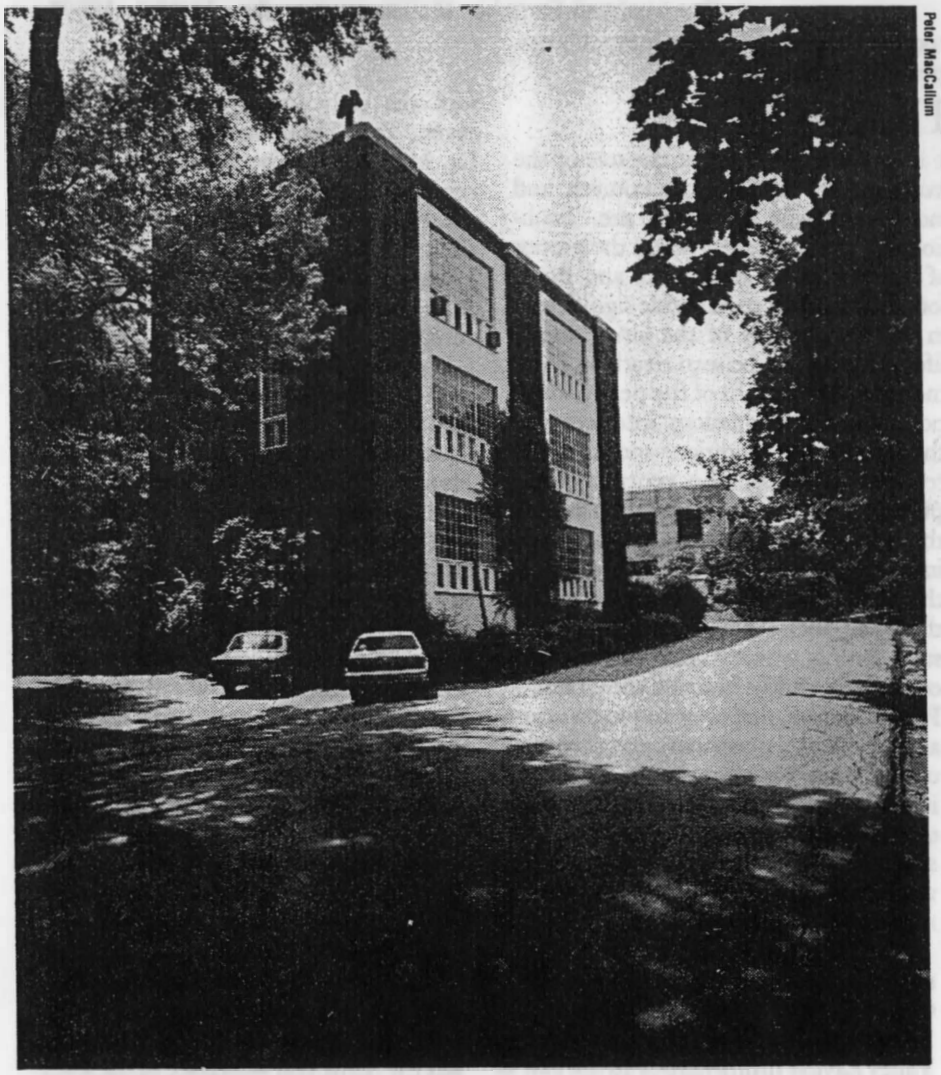
It is interesting to see the activities of the Art & Letters Club in this context. The Arts & Letters Club was organized over a series of meetings in 1907-08, in the Toronto Arcade. Its intention was to develop "By crossing the boundaries of the arts, to get rid of the illusion of art for the sake of artists." The club, which included writers, poets, architects, painters, musicians, academics and some laymen, was a sort of men's club which saw itself as an intellectual and frolicsome social institution.[14]

The club held monthly meetings at a variety of locations in the Yonge/Adelaide area: the St. Charles Restaurant, the OSA Rooms, the Brown Betty Tearoom and at the Palm Room of McConkey's on King St. West. In 1910, they moved to more permanent quarters on the upper floor of the Court House on Adelaide St. West (presently Adelaide Street Theatre). The major activities of the club were daily luncheons and a monthly dinner with guest speakers such as W.B. Yeats, Rupert Brooke, and Sir Wilfred Laurier. The most celebrated members of the club were the Group of Seven. The most famous photograph of the Group was taken at the Club at lunch. Members provided their own entertainment, either musical performances or story-telling. Such performances were customarily encouraged, as each table was supplied with 4 dozen beer, 2 bottles of Scotch and 1 bottle of Rye.

The Club moved in 1920 to its present location of St. George's Hall at 14 Elm St., a rather elaborate Dutch Gothic building off Yonge St., south of Gerrard. The main hall was redesigned by Sproatt & Rolph, architects, who added Gothic windows and a huge central fireplace. The other main decorations around the hall were large fabricated heraldic crests, based on puns that played with specific members names and attributes. The continuous references to medieval ceremony and secret male societies, although very often humorous and mocking in tone, place the Club within the British tradition of men's clubs.

From its beginnings in 1908, club membership was composed of the younger generation of painters, poets and writers of the early 20th century who identified with Canada and saw it as a source of artistic inspiration. Yet, what appears to be somewhat strange for such an association is that it still shared premises with the St. George's Society and the Empire Club. The class position of organizations such as the Arts & Letters Club — they were the fuzzy edge of the middle class — was white, male and predominantly Anglo-Saxon.

Compare this to the situation of contemporary independent producers; they are obviously more economically marginal now because they attempt to live on their incomes and bursaries as artists. The average self-employed artist's per annum income is $6,391.00.[15] The economy of the artist is further strained by the fact that from 1971 to 1981, there was a 244% increase in the number of

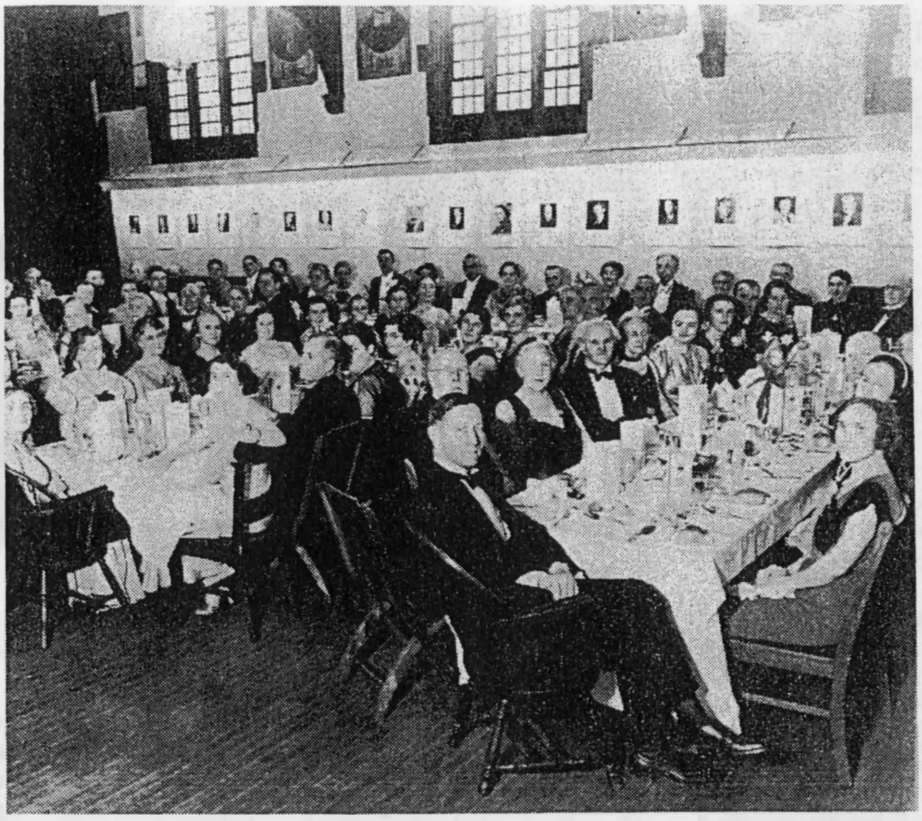


Peter MacCallum

The Studio Building was designed & built as artists' live-in studios in 1913

painters, sculptors and related artists in Canada (which does not include photographers, video producers, etc.)[16] It is definitely a growth labour force — not a growth economy.

The contemporary artist's class identification is therefore more paradoxical than at the turn of the century. Disdaining the middle class, the ascetic sensibility of the experimentalist of the 1980s demands a stance of social and aesthetic marginality. This ideological stance of marginality is lived out in the economic reality of most artists' lives. Yet at the same time the oppositional style is expected to push ahead at the leading edge of intellectual and creative society in direct relationship to the dominant classes and the cultural institutions.



Metro Reference Library

Canadian Authors Dinner, Arts & Letters Club, Elm St., 1930s

Gossip, Information and Identification

The arts community identifies itself internally from a mixture of public roles — exhibitions, magazines, dealers, jobs; and the private roles — in the bars, parties with friends and lovers. A large part of this identification process is based on what one could politely call informal information, mythology or simply gossip. This is part of the process of identification, recognition and self-consciousness that is inherent in both the 'scene' and 'the community.'

A good early example of this can be found in Harold Town's affectionate introduction to the book on Albert Franck,[17] the Toronto back yard painter of Gerrard Village. "[They were] part of the only real Bohemia Toronto had ever known, a Village crowded with people totally unaware of eccentricity as a commodity." (One could never say this about Queen St., where eccentricity is often the status-quo.)

Albert Franck and his friends, who lived and worked in the area and shared the experience of poverty, were a generation trying to break with the tedium of Toronto the Good. The stories define and elaborate the local mythology. For example, the often told story of the loudspeaker wars between Willie Fedio and Albert Franck gives an idea of the intensity of the community and the complexity of people's memories. The story goes that Fedio, a lampmaker, and his wife, the sculptor Pauline Redsell, shared a shop/studio at 84 Gerrard. Fedio installed loudspeakers outside the shop during the Christmas season to attract shoppers, and started playing — at full volume — either Mario Lanza Christmas carols or Russian military marching songs, depending on which version of the story you hear. Franck, directly across the street, was so upset that he installed his own loudspeakers and started playing — at full volume — Wagner, Beethoven and Bach. The battle of the loudspeakers went on for weeks and was a source of tension and embarrassment in the neighbourhood, as the two men played out their ego games. This would have been a real source of strife, tension and gossip in the community; 40 years later it is an anecdote.

There are many similar stories about Queen St.: the complicated scenario of Charlie Pachter and his real-estate empire; the dealers/curators who have never heard of 'conflict of interests;' the internecine wars and reconciliations in the various collectives; whether Isaacs and Carmen Lamanna are going to move south, etc.... If you delete the specific names it isn't very interesting as gossip, but it is actually the infrastructure of the information that provides its meaning and significance. To a large extent, the 'scene' exists in the talk about it, as much as it does in any physical location. It is the process of identification, recognition and self-consciousness, both at a public and private level, that produces it.

The 'community' is also a construction of written and spoken language, created in private conversation, the mainstream press and the alternate media. However, it is the individual and collective work of the artists and musicians and the labour of the galleries, studios, production co-ops, magazines and collectives that are the basic infrastructure of the 'community.'

Queen Street and the Past

In asking the question — what is to become of Queen Street? — the simplest and most cynical view would be based on recent experiences of urban gentrification. The scenario is that the artists and musicians of Queen St., as marginal elements in the city, are playing out a process of urban gentrification, defined by a larger urban economy of Domes, parking lots and real-estate developers. Artists move in — due to the low rents, improve local real-estate values, then they are pressured out by the bourgeoisie

and developers who move in — redesign, renovate, restore — and make money. Meanwhile the artists and musicians are still looking for a cheap place to live.

The history of Yorkville, primarily a music scene with craftspeople, bars, restaurants and hippies, in the mid-1960s is a perfect example. By the early 1970s the street was completely rebuilt, physically and economically, and is now the carriage trade of Toronto: designers, antique shops, night clubs and upscale mass tourism.

Yet, if one looks at the historical examples pre-dating the 1960s, one sees different versions of 'village' stories. The Yonge/Adelaide arts community offers an interesting contrast as it does not fit any of the contemporary economic and planning theories about an arts community. When the artists were hanging out in the studios in the Toronto Arcade in 1900, it was 'the' centre of the city. The post office, registry office, court house and some of the most important office buildings were in the immediate area; it was not marginal. [18] Canadian artists at the turn of the century were oriented to the middle classes. This is most clearly seen in the location of their studios, social clubs and exhibition halls within the larger city.

Gerrard Village, which Pierre Burton called 'the Village that Refused to Die,' although continuously threatened from the late 1940s, succumbed to the inevitable in the 1960s. The Toronto General Hospital, which owned the block bound by Gerrard, LaPlante and Elizabeth, started to evict people in 1963, in order to demolish the houses to make room for a parking lot. The tenants organized a 100,000 name petition and gained the support of the Toronto Planning Board. Jack Pollock, a local gallery owner, as President of the Gerrard Street Village Association, pledged with numerous others to sit in the streets to prevent bulldozers from demolishing the houses. Yet, in the end, they moved out fairly peacefully and the houses were demolished.

Some of the former residents went to Yorkville, which was starting to develop with coffee houses, bars and boutiques. Pollock and a few other shops moved to Mirvish Village, where Ed Mirvish was trying to artificially induce his own version of 'the Village.' Most of the young galleries had moved to the Yonge/Bloor area, near the Pilot Tavern, the Bohemian Embassy, the Riverboat....

Peter MacCallum

Gerrard St. West & LaPlante Ave., 1986

All that remains of the original village is the one block of houses on the north side of Gerrard St. between Bay and LaPlante. In retrospect, the death of Gerrard Village was inevitable, due to both real-estate pressure and the movement of generations and ideas. The greatest tragedy of the Village is not that it died — because it lives on in other forms — but that it was demolished to be replaced by two monster concrete towers and parking lots — a very prosaic end for a neighbourhood and community that had been creative and productive.

Queen Street and the Future

Queen St. is a potential victim of its own success, as the larger patterns and pressures of the economy of the city increasingly impact on it. As the 'scene' becomes progressively recognized outside its real or imagined borders, the pressure mounts to turn a higher profit, and it becomes an inevitable place for investment by outside interests which have no historical or cultural commitment to the area. These investors will naturally demand the highest possible rate of return, whether from retail or real-estate investment. This in turn requires a higher profit per square foot, which leaves the food, bar and retail merchant with two potential choices: sell a much higher volume of goods while maintaining low prices, or sell fewer goods at much higher prices; the latter choice engendering the carriage trade.

There is also another economic pressure in the Queen St. area. Like a wild card, new investment money flooding into Toronto from Hong Kong is throwing the usual market forces into disarray.

In the face of both these pressures, the arts community is somewhat powerless. There are, however, two elements within the present community which give artists some power. One is the presence of the non-profit cultural institutions which they created; the other is the ability of the community to organize and act politically to affect issues of housing and urban planning.

The community is defined by its own institutions, fragile as they may be. The importance of these parallel galleries and production houses should not be underestimated. They were the essential element in creating the artists community in terms of geographical and political focus. They are integral and critical to the community as they provide access to production and distribution of art work and they are the sites for its public identity. If they were to leave, either voluntarily or through economic pressures, the entire community would fragment.

Through the cultural institutions which are artist-run, the power base already exists. Members of A Space, Trinity Square Video, YYZ, The Music Gallery, Toronto Community Videotex, Art Metropole and the Independent Artists Union are involved — on an ongoing basis for most of the groups — in the development of political strategies or in real actions that have in some measure brought public and/or government attention to matters ranging from city

Ontario Archives

housing problems or provincial censorship to the economic status of the artist nationally.

The essential elements of the Queen St. community, then, are the infrastructure of artist-run spaces, the mixture of small scale commercial operations, and low-cost residential accomodations. Even if the idea of fighting for a 'locality' seems a bit odd and rather provincial, you have to decide what's important. For if artists/independent producers/musicians believe a geographic community is important, they're going to have to define what they want and make a claim for it within urban politics.

The second source of potential effectiveness is the ability of the community to act politically by developing and defining its own interests. The issue of housing for artists in this community is part of a larger economic crisis within the downtown core. That larger crisis affects all who are poor and marginal — artists, musicians, the working poor, single mothers, pensioners, ex-psychiatric patients, and immigrants. In this context, artists are among the most skilled and able, socially and politically, to organize to obtain the housing they need. The new Harbourfront studio co-op provides a potentially interesting, but perhaps limited, answer. Collective studios, similar to the art clubs of the 1900s, are also a potential solution, and have been adopted as a strategy by video artists and filmmakers.

This raises the intricate question of what to do about the (il)legal status of loft-studios in the industrial zoned area. The City's position, so far, arising out of the need to address the larger questions of industrial policy in the downtown core, has been to avoid legalization in favour of a vague enforcement policy. However, the obvious solution, the legalization of lofts, does not offer artists or other marginal groups an answer to the crisis of affordable housing because legalization would force loft spaces into the general market; they would then be subject to the cost escalation that has affected other desirable residential space in the downtown core. Without adequate rent controls and zoning protection, it is precisely their 'illegality' that keeps lofts affordable, and it is artists who are most willing and able to put up with the precariousness created by the questionable legal status of the loft. Artists should therefore approach this question with some care.[19]

Queen St. has been a generative scene for a whole group of artists/musicians/performers. It has been open to new talent, occasionally rewarding and sometimes pretentiously Post-Modern. Although the Queen St. arts community is a marginal economy — it is an outlet, as they say in the industry, a distribution point. And as the difficulty in maintaining a distribution system — a showcase to a major audience — is one of the endemic problems within Canadian culture, Queen St. should not be dismissed. The present Queen St. community, for all its recent pseudo glitz, is a focus for a culture and ideas that are locally rooted and sometimes even locally controlled. What will prevent the community from being gobbled up will be the artists and musicians community developing a more conscious and public understanding of itself, its own needs within the city and acting on them. ●

With thanks to: Jody Berland, Robert Clark, Ross Irwin and Peter MacCallum. This article is part of a larger historical research project on the history of artists' communities in Toronto. Any further historical information or ideas would be most welcomed.

Rosemary Donegan, a Canadian art historian noted for her work in cultural policy and planning, has been active in the Toronto arts community for a number of years. She was curator of the exhibition and author of the book* Spadina Avenue, *Douglas & MacIntyre, 1985.

Lambeth

(Above) Head-table at *The Conference* on The Conference on the Arts, Maison Dorie, 1961, Toronto

(left) The Group of Seven, lunching at the Arts & Letters Club, 1920s. Left to Right: Varley, Jackson, Harris, Barker Fairley (non-member), Johnston, Lismer, MacDonald (absent, Carmichael)

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ALONG QUEEN ST. WEST

McCaul St., north of Queen, west side:
Cityhome housing development
140 assisted units, 10-12 storeys

McCaul St., north of Queen, east side:
Artist non-profit housing co-op
20 units, 12 storeys

John St. & Queen, south east corner:
CITY T.V.
Renovation of existing building

John St. & Stephanie St.:
Low rise housing development
20 units

Beverley & Queen St., north east corner (vacant lot)
Japanese restaurant approved (owner may seek changes)

Soho & Queen, north west corner (vacant lot)
Retail development connected with fashion industry
2-3 storey

Portland & Queen St., south west corner (vacant lot)
Development unknown
Probably consisting of mixed housing and retail

ZONING IN QUEEN ST. WEST AREA

The area south of Queen St. from Simcoe to Dufferin is zoned for purposes. Restaurants (under 5,000 sq. ft.), banks, and other service retail outlets are permitted (plus existing non-conforming uses).

The area is presently the site of the garment industry, the film and recording industry, and increasingly the communications industry (publishing, etc.). This conforms to existing city zoning, as an industrial area, new office/commercial or residential uses are not permitted.

Ontario Archives

The Pilot Tavern, a well-known artists' hangout at Yonge & Bloor in the 1950s and 1960s.

NOTES

[1]Although this article focuses exclusively on Toronto, it does not mean to imply that it is the only art community in Canada. It examines the popular notions about the art scene and the metropole and how they are represented (i.e. a Saskatoon art student would have a pre-conceived idea about Queen St. from the art press and mass media). The article attempts to provide an alternative interpretation that is not purely Toronto-centric.

[2]See: John E. Zucchi, "Italian Hometown Settlements and the Development of an Italian Community in Toronto, 1875-1935;" Steven A. Speisman, "St. John's Shtetl: the Ward in 1911;" Dora Nipp, "The Chinese in Toronto;" in Robert F. Harney, *Gathering Places: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto, 1985.

[3]Based on interviews with: Avrom Isaacs, Sydney Katz, Nancy Meek Pocock, Allan Suddon, David Smith and Harold Town's *Albert Franck: Keeper of the Lanes*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1974.

[4]T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1985.

[5]Newton McTavish, *Art Longa*, Ontario Publishing Co. Ltd., Toronto, 1938.

[6]William Dendy, *Lost Toronto*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1978, pp. 153-155.

[7]Ann Thomas, *Canadian Painting and Photography, 1860-1900*, McCord Museum, Montreal, 1979, pp. 26, 29.

[8]Joan Murray, *The Ontario Society of Artists: 100 Years*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1972.

[9]See: Charles Hill, "To Build a National Gallery: The Royal Canadian Academy, 1880-1913," National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1980 (broadsheet).

[10]See William Colgate, *Canadian Art, Its Origin and Development*, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1943, Chapters 4, 5, 6.

[11]Barrie Hale, "Out of the Park: Modernist Painting in Toronto, 1950-1980," *Provincial Essays*, vol. 2, Toronto, 1985.

[12]Christine Boyanoski, *The 1940s. A Decade of Painting in Ontario*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1984.

[13]Rebecca Sisler, *The Girls*, Clarke, Irwin & Co., Toronto, 1972, pp. 26, 29.

[14]Augustus Bridle, "How the Club Came to Be," *The Lamps*, Dec. 1919, pp. 7-14.

[15]Statistics Canada, 1981 Census Data in *A Canadian Dictionary and Selected Statistical Profile of Arts Employment*, Canada Council, 1984.

[16]See: "Growth in Experienced Arts Labour Force by Occupation," Table 13, *Profile of the Visual Arts*, Canada Council

[17]Harold Town, *Albert Franck: Keeper of the Lanes*, op. cit., and interviews mentioned in note 3.

[18]See: Gunter Gad & Deryck Holdsworth, "Building for City, Region and Nation. Office Development in Toronto, 1834-1984." in Victor L. Russell, *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1984, pp. 281-282.

[19]The overall experience of New York artists, especially in the Soho area, was that once lofts became legalized and therefore were on the open market, rents skyrocketted and the artists could no longer afford to live in the area. The former industrial tenants were also forced out, being unable to compete with Manhattan residential rent rates. See also: New York City Planning Commission, *Lofts: Balancing the Inequities*, February, 1981.