

Bishop's University Receives Generous Donation of Frederick Simpson Coburn Paintings

Philanthropist Scott Taylor and Goldbloom family gifts

Sherbrooke, April 21, 2023 – Bishop's University is grateful for the generous donation of 12 paintings by distinguished Eastern Townships artist Frederick Simpson Coburn, D.C.L. '36.

Philanthropist Scott Taylor has contributed 11 of the paintings, while the Goldbloom family has gifted an additional piece. The artist himself donated a painting to the University in 1942.

Born in Upper Melbourne, Coburn studied art in Montreal, Berlin, and London. His early work featured book illustrations, often portraying French Canadian society. He won the Art Association of Montreal's Jessie Dow prize, exhibited at the Tate Gallery in London, and was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. His work can also be found in public collections at the National Gallery of Canada and the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Sherbrooke.

"The University has been fortunate to have a Coburn in its collection and we are very grateful to Scott Taylor for this extraordinary gift of 11 paintings," said Michael Goldbloom, C.M., Principal and Vice-Chancellor. "I've known Mr. Coburn's work since I was a young child as my grandparents had one of his paintings and it was inherited by my parents. I would like to thank my sister Susan and my brother Jonathan for agreeing to donate our Coburn to Bishop's."

The paintings will be displayed in the McGreer Building's Tomlinson Hall, the boardroom where the University's Board of Governors and Academic Senate meet.

Community members and visitors to the campus can view the artwork by making an appointment with the Office of the University Librarian.

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Frederick Simpson Coburn

Frederick Simpson Coburn was born in Upper Melbourne, Quebec in 1871. He began drawing at a young age, focusing on images of people at church, horses, and ladies' hats. Coburn started studying art at 16 and went on to study at various schools in Montréal, New York City, Berlin, Munich, France, and London. He started his career as an illustrator around 1898 and illustrated works by William Henry Drummond, Louis Fréchette, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Washington Irving, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Robert Browning. He met his future wife, Malvina Scheepers, in Antwerp, and they were married in Canada in 1916.

Coburn eventually became famous for his paintings of winter scenes, particularly those featuring horses, sleds, and woodworkers in the Eastern Townships and Laurentians. He began using colored oil paintings as his preferred medium in 1914 after being influenced by Maurice Cullen.

In 1920, Frederick S. Coburn was finally recognized by the Royal Canadian Academy when he was elected as an associate member. Later in 1924, he was recognized as one of Canada's most prominent artists. His works have been exhibited in galleries around the globe.

After his wife's death in 1933, he found a new passion for capturing the movement of dance, which became the main theme of his paintings and photographs. Frederick Simpson Coburn passed away in on the 26th of May 1960 in his Upper Melbourne studio.

Coburn's artistic contributions have had a profound impact on subsequent generations of Canadian artists and have significantly enriched Canada's cultural heritage. His use of vibrant colors and loose brushstrokes to capture the tranquility of the countryside is exceptional, and his paintings' balance and proportion are unique due to his skillful use of contrasting colors and tonal shifts. Coburn's artwork serves not only as a tribute to Canada's wilderness but also as a historical record of the evolution of Impressionism in Canada. His paintings provide valuable insights into Canada's social and cultural landscape, offering a unique perspective on rural life in the 20th century, the impact of climate change on Canada's landscapes, and the dynamics of gender roles, social hierarchies, and ethnic interactions. As a result, art historians, collectors, and cultural organizations consider Coburn to be a significant figure, and social scientists continue to study his artwork to gain a deeper understanding of Canadian society.