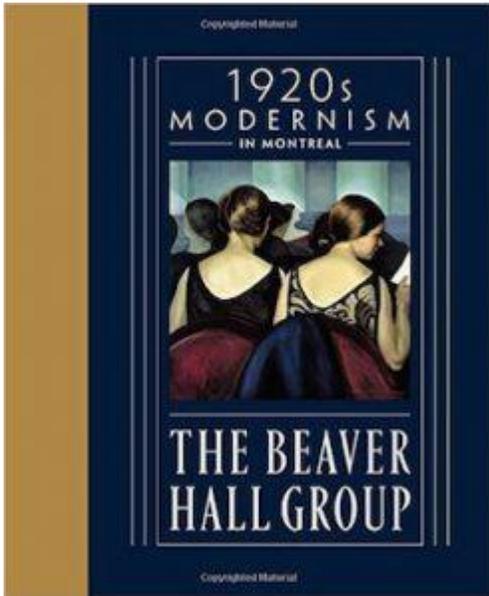


## 2016 Melva J. Dwyer Award Winner

### *1920s Modernism in Montreal: The Beaver Hall Group*



The 2016 Melva J. Dwyer Award winner is *1920s Modernism in Montreal: The Beaver Hall Group*, published in 2015 through a partnership of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Black Dog Publishing in both an English and a French edition. The publication was edited by Jacques des Rochers, curator of Canadian and Quebec Art before 1945 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Brian Foss, Director of the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University in Ottawa, to accompany an exhibition of the same name, which they also curated. Contributors include Kristina Huneault, Concordia University, H  l  ne Sicotte, Universit   du Qu  bec    Montr  al (UQAM), and Esther Tr  panier, UQAM.

The Beaver Hall Group was a diverse assortment of like-minded Montreal-based artists, many of whom shared a studio and exhibition space on the city's Beaver Hall Hill in the early 1920s. Early adopters of new modernist approaches to painting, this collective explored their potential within a variety of genres,

including portraits, still life, landscapes, and scenes of urbanity in Montreal—then as now, an industrialized city and one of the busiest ports in the world. To quote curator Brian Foss, “Unlike the Group of Seven’s vast interpretations of Canada’s natural, unblemished backdrops, Beaver Hall Group art featured portraits of contemporary Canadian individuals, rural life and urbanized, populated cityscapes...a progressive vision of what Canadian modern art could be...a distinctly Montreal type of modernism.”

The Beaver Hall Group was also exceptional for their inclusion of female artists as core members, representing half the group’s number. The group was short-lived, but its membership includes some of Canada’s most celebrated painters: Prudence Heyward, A.Y. Jackson, and Edwin Holgate.

The 352-page publication is the most comprehensive study of this group to date, featuring a series of six essays that deal with the social and artistic contexts in which the group was formed, interweaving their work within the broader narratives of the arts in the early 20th century, the rise of the metropolis, the intersection of economic progress with cultural development, and the impact of gender on critical approaches to both the artists and their work.

The text includes high-quality reproductions of the members’ works—some well-known, but others not previously reproduced. These effectively convey the group’s innovative use of color that a contemporary reviewer compared to the jazz music of the time: “not harmonious tones but colours that dazzle like the screech of a trumpet.” As well as documenting the exhibition, this catalogue includes a rich collection of contextual illustrations, exhibition invitations, press coverage, maps, film stills, and photographs.

Almost no documentation of the Beaver Hall Group survived, and what did was difficult to locate. The contributors’ intensive research is demonstrated in the publication’s bibliography that excels at representing archival and other sources, supplemented by indexes to artist and institutional entries and a list of works. The end matter includes bibliographies of 29 artists, an appendix of exhibitions by artists linked to the Beaver Hall Group from 1920-33, and tables demonstrating shared experience in education, travel, and awards.

The award committee recommends this essential exhibition catalogue not only for Canadian visual arts libraries, but for all libraries with an interest in urban and cultural history.

The members of the 2016 Melva J. Dwyer Award Committee are: Sylvia Roberts, Simon Fraser University (chair); Jennifer Garland, McGill University; Philip Dombowsky, National Gallery of Canada; and Daniel Payne, OCAD University.