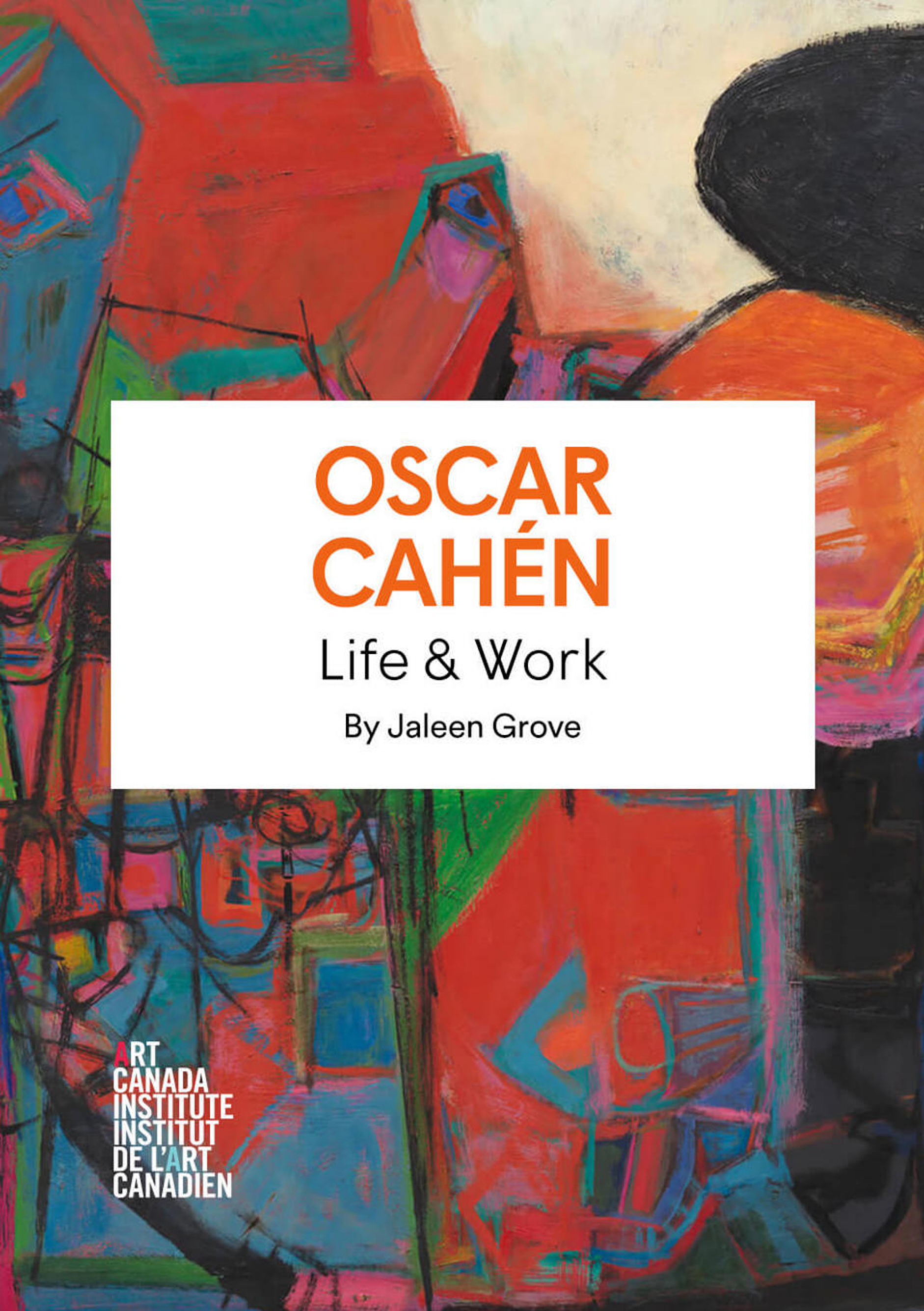


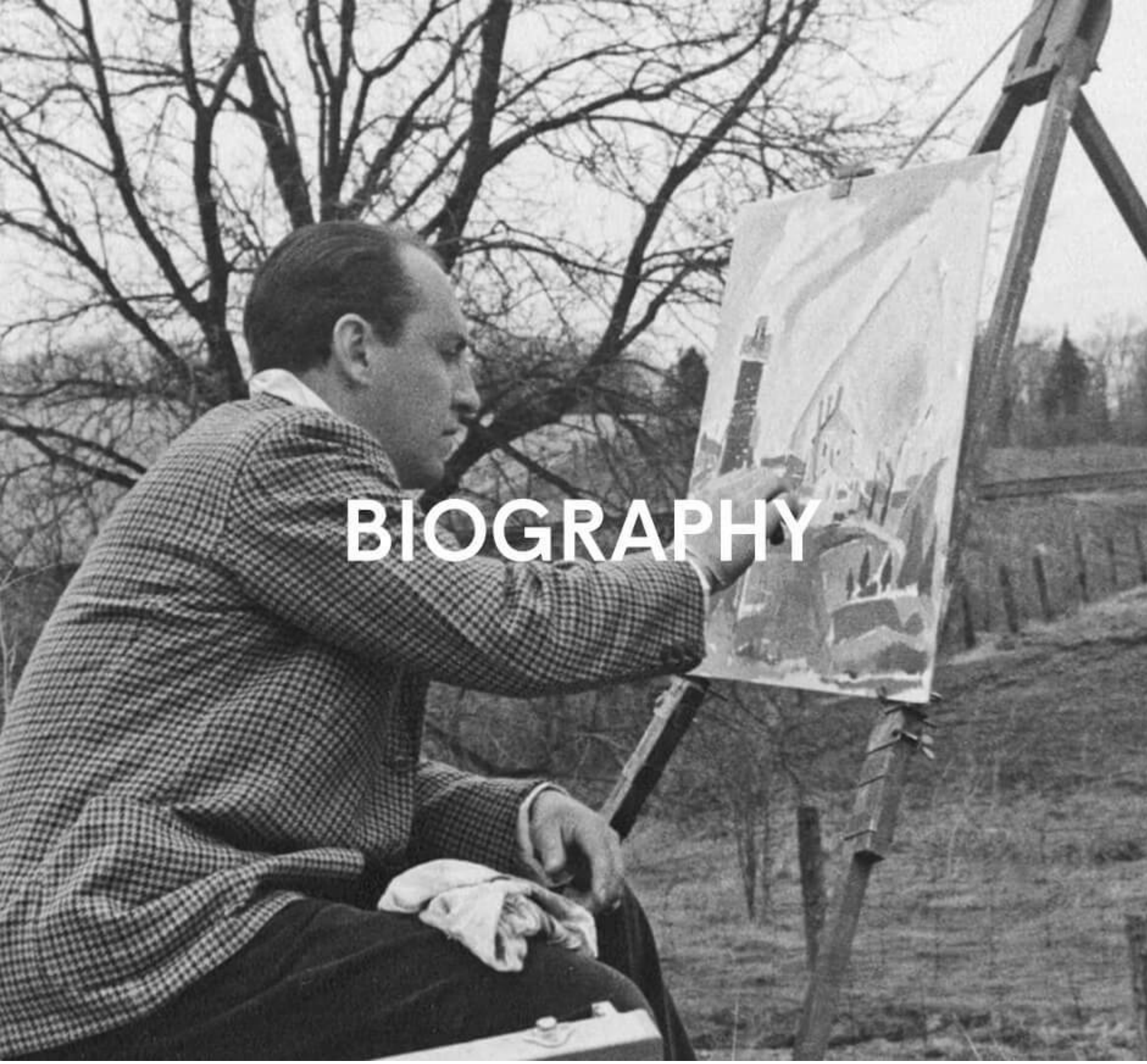
OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work

By Jaleen Grove

ART CANADA INSTITUTE
INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN

Contents



BIOGRAPHY

Oscar Cahén (1916–1956) arrived in Quebec from Europe in 1940 as an unwilling refugee. Yet in a few short years the vibrant and emotionally complex artist would broaden the scope of illustration and painting in Canada. Cahén died suddenly in 1956, but not before rising to be one of the nation's most celebrated illustrators as well as a major influence on fellow abstract painters, with whom he formed the renowned artist collective Painters Eleven.

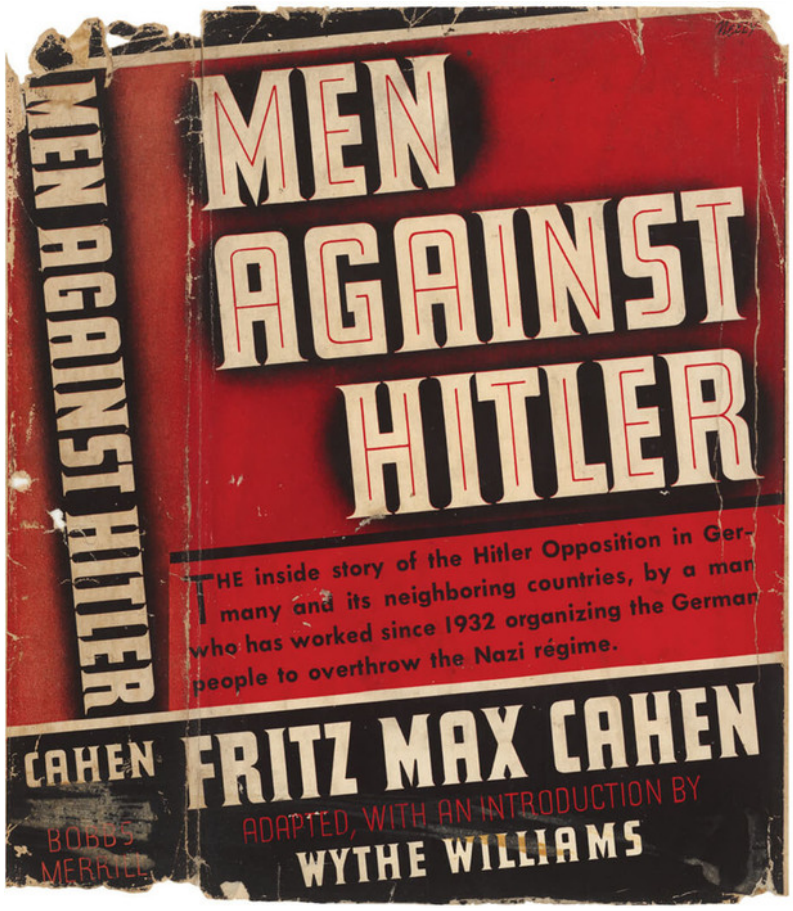
CHILD OF MANY NATIONS

There exists a photograph of a grinning, teenaged Oscar Maximilian Cahén and two unidentified companions taken at the Zwinger Palace in Dresden, Germany. Young Cahén had used a fake birth date in order to gain acceptance into Dresden's State Academy for Applied Arts in March 1932, at the age of sixteen.[1] The photo, with a corner now ripped away, bears the scars of the upheaval soon to come: Nazi aggression precipitated his family's departure from Germany, then his separation from his parents, and his eventual arrival in Canada as an interned refugee.

Oscar Cahén, right, and an unidentified couple visiting Zwinger Palace in Dresden, c. 1932. The Zwinger Palace was mostly destroyed by carpet-bombing raids in February 1945 and was reconstructed in the decades following the war.

Oscar was born to Fritz Max and Eugenie Cahén on February 8, 1916, in Copenhagen; his Jewish father was first a professor of art history and then a prominent Copenhagen correspondent for the German newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*.[2] Fritz Max Cahén also translated the works of Apollinaire for the Expressionist periodical *Der Sturm* and published art criticism.[3] By 1916 he was a confidant of and assistant to Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, who represented Germany during the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles. Fritz Max also became involved in espionage during the war.[4]

From 1920 to 1932 Fritz Max Cahén's journalism work brought the family to Berlin, Paris, and Rome. Adolescent Oscar studied art in the latter two cities, but no details are at present known.[5] In Dresden, Oscar took illustration and commercial art instruction in the Academy studio of Max Frey (1874–1944). At this time, advertising and popular illustration were thought by many to be the art of modern times. Posters were considered "art for the people," decorating outdoor space and improving the public's aesthetic sophistication.



LEFT: Cover of the first American edition of Fritz Max Cahén's *Men Against Hitler*, 1939. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (559), 1931, ink on paper, 95.3 x 69.9 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. This is a poster design Cahén made as a student at the State Academy for Applied Arts, Dresden.

ON THE RUN

Fritz Max Cahén, a Social Democrat, was assaulted when he attempted to address a Nazi meeting in 1930. Two years later, he began collaborating with an underground network to oppose Hitler.[6] In 1933, when the Nazi Party rose to power, the Cahéns' German citizenships were revoked because of Fritz Max's Jewish blood.

Pursued by forty storm troopers, the family stole out of Dresden on August 3, 1933—with Oscar in "a state of nerves" so bad that his father feared it would betray their intent to defect at the Czech border.[7] By May 1934 the Cahéns had shifted to Stockholm, where Oscar continued to study art.[8] He also mounted a solo exhibition in Copenhagen that attracted reviews offering encouragement for his "refined advertising art."[9]

The Cahéns returned to Prague in March 1935, where Fritz Max Cahén led a resistance group—and resumed espionage.[10] Oscar contributed to the desperate family finances with advertising art commissions, erotic drawings, and cartoons.[11] Many were anti-Hitler jokes.[12] One, published in the German refugees' satirical magazine *Der Simpl*, shows two semi-nude women. The first says, "My husband is an angel," to which the other replies, "Rejoice, mine is still alive!"

This cartoon drawn by Cahén appeared in the Czech paper *Osveny* in 1934. The caption reads, "My husband is an angel!" "Rejoice, mine is still alive."

Impoverished, Oscar was graciously given some studio space by William Pachner (b. 1915), an established illustrator who later moved to the United States.[14] Oscar and Pachner formed a partnership, and Oscar quickly absorbed Pachner's fluid style.[14]

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, c. 1943, clippings of published work, publication unknown, approx. 9 x 6 and 10 x 7 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. Cahén's cartoons depict Japan's Emperor Hirohito, Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini, German Chancellor Adolph Hitler, and SS leader Heinrich Himmler. Cahén has inscribed the cartoons "based on Szik [*sic*]" indicating the influence of cartoon artist Arthur Szyk, a Polish-Jewish illustrator, whose satirical cartoons circulated widely during WWII.

Oscar not only became a member of his father's group but also assisted by illegally crossing the border into Germany for unknown purposes, and helped complete an arms deal his father brokered.[15] In 1937 Czech police interrogated the Cahéns about illegal short-wave radio equipment in Oscar's possession (for broadcasting anti-Nazi propaganda) and searched their apartment.[16] Soon after Fritz Max travelled to the United States, ostensibly to write about American democracy for a Czech paper.[17] It would be twenty years before he and Eugenie would be reunited.

LEFT: Poster designed by Vilém Rotter for the 1934 International Fair in Prague. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (084), 1939, ink and watercolour on illustration board, 68.6 x 54 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

In mid-1937 Oscar began working and teaching at the Rotter School of Advertising Art in Prague and working at the related Rotter Studio. This large ad agency founded by Vilém Rotter (1903–1960), one of the most progressive graphic designers in Europe, handled automobile industry and other big accounts. But Oscar was forced to quit after a few months because the state did not permit refugees to work.[18] He therefore planned to emigrate to the United States.[19]

Instead, Oscar and Eugenie made a narrow escape to England on March 3, 1939—twelve days before Nazi occupation of Prague. Czech officials who remembered Fritz Max's service got them passports, but only with difficulty because of Oscar's involvement with the radio and arms deal.[20]

WARTIME IN QUEBEC

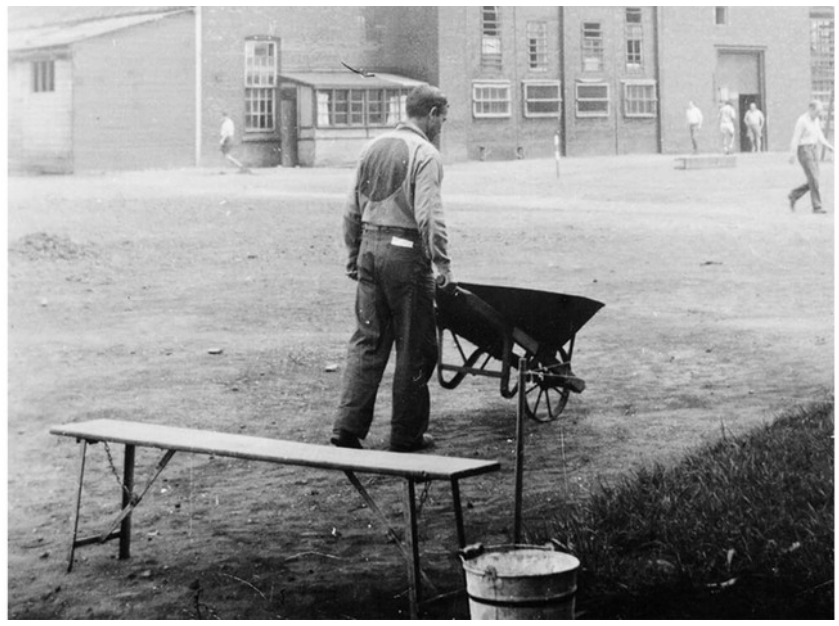
Cahén was prohibited from working in Britain too, but he kept drawing. In May 1940 the British government began to detain refugees, lest they be German spies. Twenty-four-year-old Cahén was loaded onto the prison ship *Ettric* with over two thousand mainly German Jewish men officially classed as prisoners of war and enemy aliens. They arrived in Montreal on July 13, 1940.[21] Eugenie, too, was interned from May 1940 to December 1941, in Great Britain. They were not to see each other again for seven years.

Among Oscar Cahén's effects is a poem that he wrote in German:

> I'm living in the filth of an old factory. . .
> I have a courtyard and a machine hall,
> Guards and a barbed wire fence.
> We are 700 of us, and can only
> Look out over it angry and swearing.
>
> They feed us well and dress us warm
> And look past us with contempt.
> Never before in our lives were we so poor –
> And what's more once we were free.[22]

A group of internees behind the barbed-wire fences at the Camp N internment camp in Sherbrooke, Quebec, on November 19, 1945. Library and Archives Canada.

The scene is Camp N, near Sherbrooke, Quebec, where Cahén was interned for two years. Later, he equated Camp N with a Nazi prisoner of war camp in a short-story illustration; the telltale jacket with the scarlet circle identifies it as Camp N, where interns had to wear the hated red target on their backs. According to former inmates, abuse ranging from schoolyard-level anti-Semitism to rape was committed by Canadian soldiers there.[23] But Cahén's fellow "camp boys" remember him as cheerful, cracking jokes with a wry "Berliner" wit.[24] These two faces—one dark and tragic, the other playful and optimistic—characterize not just Cahén's personality, but his later artwork as well.



LEFT: Cahén's illustration for the short story, "Mail," by John Norman Harris, *Maclean's*, 1950. RIGHT: Photograph of an internee in a camp uniform at Camp N in Sherbrooke, Quebec, c. 1940–42. Photograph by internee Marcell Seidler, who secretly documented camp life using a handmade pinhole camera.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, c. 1941, watercolour on paper, 14.6 x 21.6 cm, collection of Beatrice Fischer. Cahén mailed this watercolour and its counterpart (*right*) to Beatrice Fischer while he was interned in Camp N. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, c. 1941, watercolour on paper, 14.6 x 21.6 cm, collection of Beatrice Fischer. This image and its counterpart (*left*) likely depict the landscape around the camp in Sherbooke, Quebec.

His intimate friend Beatrice Shapiro Fischer relates that she met Oscar Cahén when she—an editorial staff member of *Magazine Digest* in Toronto—came to interview an internee, and Cahén bribed the other men with drawings so that they would drop out of the line-up to see her. Crowded into a guard's kiosk with no place to sit, standing eye to eye as she asked her questions, they fell in love. Cahén was "wonderfully humorous," she remembers, but clearly suffering from stress. He was "this quivering, brilliant, agonized presence" and "his face was pain-filled . . . that pain never entirely left him."[25]

In 1942 a liaison with the Central Committee for Interned Refugees took his and other internees' artwork to prospective employers in Montreal. *The Standard* requested drawings of a rather clichéd ski chalet scene while cautioning that "this trial is on a purely speculative basis."[26] Soon *The Standard* proudly told readers: "[Oscar Cahén's illustrations] are so outstanding that we've sent him some of our coming fiction offerings. . . . Watch for his name because he is our 'find' in the world of commercial art."[27] Contrary to previous reports,[28] the subjects Cahén illustrated were amusing and lighthearted. He loyally remained a regular illustrator for *The Standard* until his death.

Meanwhile Oscar and Beatrice kept

up correspondence, and she moved to Montreal in order to help free the interns. Secure employment was the prerequisite for being released from Camp N, so Beatrice found jobs for herself and then for Oscar with entrepreneur Colin Gravenor, who ran a public relations firm. Oscar Cahén was released from Camp N on October 26, 1942. At Gravenor's firm, he and Beatrice collaborated as writer and illustrator.

Oscar Cahén and Beatrice Fischer photographed on the street in Montreal, c. 1943.

In November 1943 Gravenor used his influence to get Cahén into a prestigious exhibition at the Art Association of Montreal.[29] There was no better exposure for a Montreal artist.[30] A review noted that Cahén "works by many methods, in many styles, and with many subjects . . . there are good designs . . . neat caricatures and remarkably good and suggestive sketches of heads and figures."[31] Earlier the same year Cahén had joined the Montreal office of Rapid, Grip and Batten, where he was the highest paid artist, at $90 a week.[32]

In 1943 American officials told Oscar that Fritz Max was mentally ill and required "chemical therapy," and could be deported back to Nazi-controlled Europe.[33] His mother, meanwhile, was stuck in England, where she now worked for the BBC. Despite these traumas, Oscar's personal life improved.

STABILITY IN TORONTO

Although he retained his love for Beatrice, in 1943 Oscar met and married Martha (Mimi) Levinsky, daughter of a Polish rabbi, who had spent her childhood in the Netherlands.[34] Sadly for Mimi, her Orthodox parents disowned her for marrying Oscar. Their only child, Michael, was born May 8, 1945; Michael–affectionately nicknamed The Noodnik and The Monster–appeared in several cover designs for *Maclean's* and other magazines.

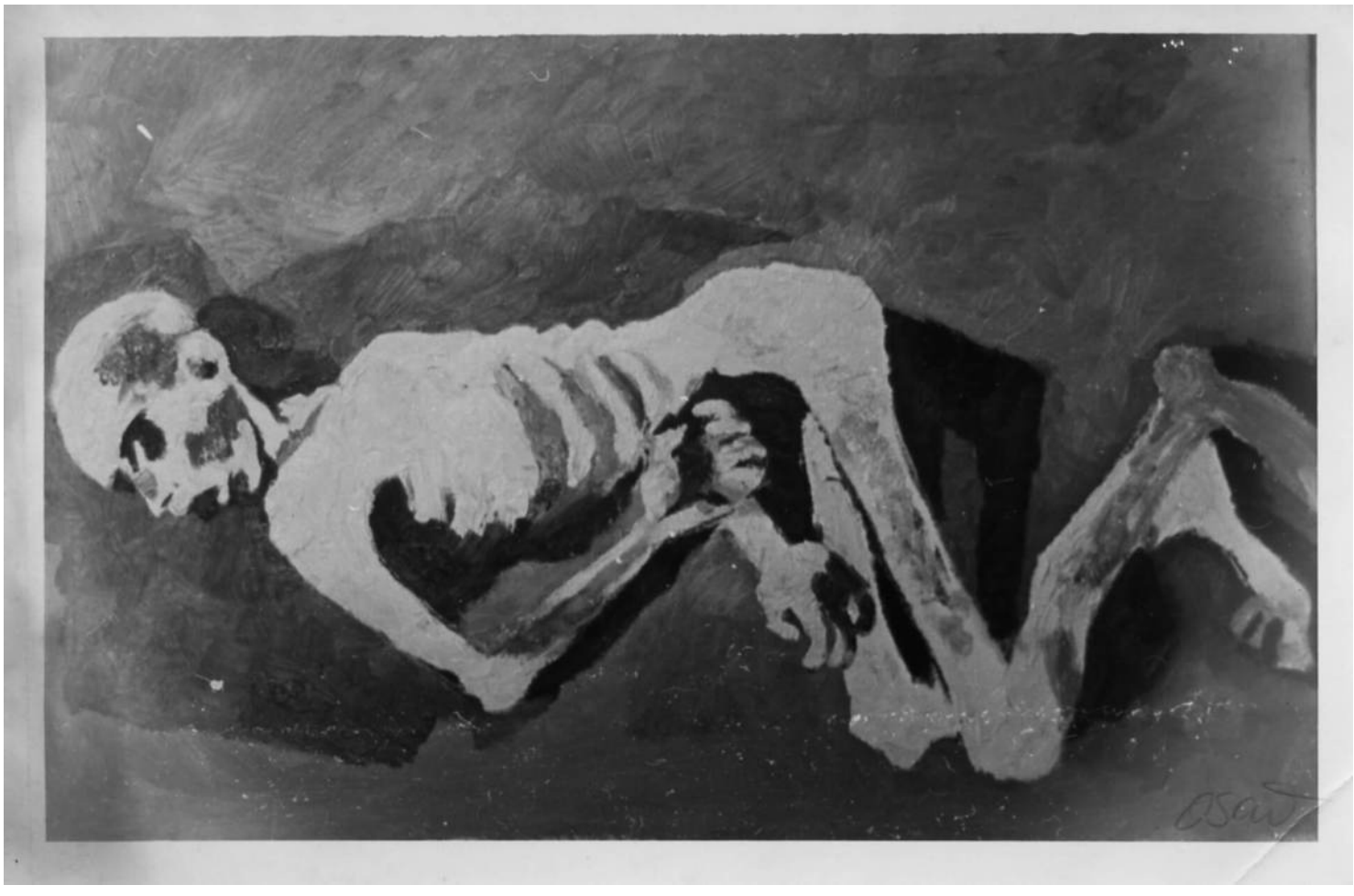
LEFT: Michael, Oscar, and Mimi at their home in King Township, 1951. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Magazine Digest* cover design, c. 1946, printer's proof, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

In late 1944 Oscar Cahén moved to Toronto to become art director for *Magazine Digest*. He introduced cheerful covers and interior cartoons and, in

utter contrast, two gut-wrenching visual essays concerning impoverished Native Americans and orphaned children in Europe.

Cahén began to put down roots, building a rustic house and studio himself on Fogwood Farm near King City (just north of Toronto) in 1946.[35] The families of illustrator Frank Fog (1915–unknown) and art director Bill Kettlewell (1914–1988) already had houses there. That same year he was granted Canadian citizenship; in June 1947 his mother arrived from England. With the stability of steady freelance income and a home of his own at last, Cahén gave up *Magazine Digest* and began painting for himself. It was finally safe to process the years of exile and war, and he "began to release fine frenzies in paint [that] if left pent-up torment him to the point of nervous breakdown," as one news feature put it.[36]

Fritz Max, still not well, was at first not permitted and was then unwilling to join his wife and son in Canada.[37] Perhaps these painful facts informed Oscar's images of suffering families and grief, their bodies marked with savage, heavy strokes. Paintings from this time, known only from inscribed photographs, depict an emaciated Holocaust victim and a drowned woman. During the late 1940s Cahén also produced a series of paintings and mixed-media works on Christian themes, including the largest canvas he had completed to date, the highly Cubist *The Adoration*, 1949.



Photograph of lost painting, captioned "*This is Belsen inmate*" on reverse, c. 1946.

Despite the darkness within, the charismatic Cahén hosted weekly summer

gatherings,[38] and his social circle expanded happily to include artists and designers Harold Town (1924–1990), Walter Trier (1890–1951), Albert Franck (1899–1973), and Walter Yarwood (1917–1996).

PROSPERITY AND PROMINENCE

Around 1949 Cahén began exploring wholly abstract forms, establishing his personal vocabulary of crescents, spikes, ovoids, and hot, startling colour by 1952. He also explored printmaking and ceramics. His time seems to have been split fairly evenly between illustrating and painting, the former providing the financial stability and social prominence that allowed him to be as experimental as he wanted in his self-directed works.

Oscar Cahén, illustration for "The Most Beautiful Girl I've Ever Known," 1951, by Douglas Carmichael, *Maclean's*, September 15, 1951, rotogravure tearsheet. The location of original art for this illustration is currently unknown.

In about 1951 a New York firm purportedly was unsuccessful in their attempt to recruit Oscar Cahén with an offer of a $25,000 salary (the average U.S. income for 1950 was $3,216).[39] Between 1950 and 1957, Canadian magazines published at least three hundred of Cahén's illustrations. His rendering for "The Most Beautiful Girl I've Ever Known" won the 1952 medal for Editorial Illustration from the Art Directors Club of Toronto; it was then exhibited by the Art Directors Club of New York, alongside Norman Rockwell (1894–1978), Al Parker (1906–1985), and other American luminaries.[40] In *Canadian Art* magazine Cahén said, "The trade of illustrator is often looked down upon by 'fine artists' which is regrettable.… Creative illustration combines fine artistic values with literary and realistic interpretations."[41]
He was able to purchase a sports car, and around 1952 the Cahéns began to

drive to resorts near Venice and Naples in Florida each winter, where many American artists were active. Research on his time there, the connections made, the art seen, and what cities they may have visited on the long journeys back and forth has not yet been done. Near Oakville, Ontario, the Cahéns built a sophisticated new house with a large studio space and moved there in 1955. The house was a galaxy of difference from the makeshift barracks of Camp N, where Oscar had made his first Canadian illustrations.

LEFT: Photograph of Cahén taken for an article in the Autumn 1950 issue of *Canadian Art* magazine, but unused. RIGHT: Oscar in his beloved Austin-Healey sports car.

Creatively, illustration had the advantages of access to a wide audience and licence to explore media and ideas not considered serious enough for gallery art—but the obligation to communicate in easily understood pictures precluded certain types of creative expression. Abstract painting permitted self-expression in non-literal modes—but many Canadians and fellow artists did not appreciate such art. The problem of broadening Canadians' visual horizons was a matter of concern for avant-garde and modern artists. In 1948 expatriate painter James Imlach (untraced)—a friend of Cahén, Walter Yarwood (1917–1996), and Harold Town (1924–1990)—writing from New York, urged them "to work towards a true progressive school of art in Canada and show the world what the soil of spacious freedom can do for mankind."[42] In 1953 the three discussed mounting an exhibition of abstract painting only, in order to show "a unity of contemporary purpose."[43]

By coincidence, only weeks later,

artist William Ronald (1926–1998) convinced the Simpson's department store in Toronto to display some abstract paintings with their sleek postwar modern furniture. Cahén submitted *Candy Tree*, 1952–53, and *Bird and Flowers*, 1953. According to Town, during a publicity photo shoot of participants, Cahén brought up the group show idea, and an ensuing meeting resulted in the formation of the collective Painters Eleven to do just that.[44] Active until 1960, Painters Eleven members were Jack Bush (1909–1997), Cahén, Hortense Gordon (1889–1961), Tom Hodgson (1924–2006), Alexandra Luke (1901–1967), Jock Macdonald (1897–1960), Ray Mead (1921–1998), Kazuo Nakamura (1926–2002), Ronald, Town, and Yarwood.

LEFT: Members of the Painters Eleven during the Simpson's department store *Abstracts at Home* display, 1953. *From left*: Tom Hodgson, Oscar Cahén, Alexandra Luke, Kazuo Nakamura, Ray Mead, Jack Bush, and William Ronald. Photo by Everett Roseborough. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Candy Tree*, 1952–53, oil on Masonite, 123 x 75 cm, private collection.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, *Requiem*, c. 1953, oil on canvas, current location unknown. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (616), 1956, oil on Masonite, 58.4 x 84.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. *Untitled* (616), 1956, is likely unfinished. It was on his easel at his time of death in November 1956.

The group legitimized abstract art, inspired younger artists to follow avant-garde directions, and brought Canadian art into conversation with international contemporary art trends and critics.

The work Cahén now produced was playful, bright, and lyrical; it was also bold, dark, and aggressive, reflecting the ongoing contrasts in Cahén's life. A growing, invigorating public profile encouraged his output: Cahén's exhibition record between 1953 and 1956 reveals that his art was on display almost constantly,[45] while his illustrations appeared every month.

Cahén was so well known by 1953 that he was asked to give a celebrity

endorsement for a Crosley television set ad.[46] His canvas *Requiem*, c. 1953 (currently unlocated) was included in the 2nd Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, 1953–54. While success came rapidly now, dark corners remained: his father, Fritz Max Cahén, still resided in the United States, and Oscar said that he had "lost touch" with him.[47] His wife, Mimi, doubtlessly suffering from her own family history, proved to be a difficult partner. Oscar's strong but secret feelings for his friend Beatrice Fischer, whom he saw often, continued.[48]

Portrait of Oscar Cahén in his studio in 1951. Photograph by Page Toles.

Oscar Cahén included mainly abstract works in his first solo art show (Hart House, Toronto, October 16, 1954). Yet he continued to value representational approaches: in 1956 he used a sun motif in a mural commissioned by Imperial Oil, and he completed the large canvas *Warrior*, 1956. Stark contrasts power the abstract work *Untitled* (616) of the same year: its forceful brushwork is both optimistically energetic and tersely violent.

One late-autumn day in 1956, driving home in his new Studebaker Hawk, Oscar Cahén died in a collision with an oncoming dump truck. He was forty years old. There is a photograph of Oscar Cahén taken in 1951 and later inscribed on the back by his mother, Eugenie: "My beloved son Oscar Cahén shortly before his death 1956, 26 November." The photo shows a much different Oscar than the grinning boy seen in Dresden circa 1930. This Oscar, filled with memories of disenfranchisement, flight, internment, and rebirth in a strange country, does not smile: he stands erect with fists on hips before his easel and numerous drawings, staring boldly, defiantly, into the lens, serious about his work.[49]

In the aftermath of Cahén's death, Harold Town and Walter Yarwood arranged a memorial exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Toronto in March 1959, and other retrospectives have followed over the years. Nevertheless, Cahén's legacy was diminished by the lingering after-effects of wartime trauma: Eugenie left to rejoin Fritz Max, who had returned to Germany in 1954; and Mimi, suffering from depression, could not manage the estate well alone. As a result, most of Cahén's drawings and paintings lay unknown in storage for over forty years. Happily, when his son, Michael Cahén, inherited the collection, he began making it and related papers accessible, and scholars are re-evaluating Oscar Cahén's contribution to Canadian art.

KEY WORKS

Oscar Cahén moved nimbly between media, style, and subject matter as if he were twenty different artists in one. Consequently, the following handful of works necessarily omits many facets relevant to his oeuvre. Nevertheless, it is possible to tell a story of Cahén's creative journey through a selection of his art that marks some of the major themes and formal aesthetic problems that concerned him, as well as through an exploration of the important milestones in his rise to prominence.

UNTITLED (PIANO PLAYER) 1943

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled (Piano Player)*, 1943
Conté on wove paper, 50.8 x 38.1 cm
Private collection

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

A jazz and nightlife aficionado, Oscar Cahén played guitar and clarinet. Gerry Waldston, who apprenticed with Cahén at the commercial art studio Rapid, Grip and Batten in 1944, recalls that "he was crazy for music and when he drew the stuff he could shake it out of his elbow like it was nothing –*nothing*!"[1] This facility is evident in the immediate, gestural quality of his sketch of a pianist.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén with a guitar, c. 1945. Photograph by Geraldine Carpenter. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, illustration for "A Night Out in Montreal," *Weekend*, December 28, 1956, tearsheet.

In 1943 Cahén included this drawing in a show at the Art Association of Montreal, the city's most prestigious art venue.[2] The African-American musician's features are simplified and exaggerated, in a manner not unlike that of celebrity caricaturist Al Hirschfeld (1903–2003) and Quebec political cartoonist Robert LaPalme (1908–1997). Although the portrait's racial stereotyping may be objectionable today, it was not intended to be disrespectful by 1943 standards. In the assured, graceful curves of the man's arm, back, and dignified, elevated head, which contrast with the jumble of the rapidly moving fingers, Cahén has captured the musician's self-confidence and dexterity. One reviewer commented, "Oscar Cahén has a flair for figures in motion and succeeds very well,"[3] while another said, "we found [Cahén's] rough of a boogey-woogey pianist superb."[4]

In following years Cahén was often asked to illustrate glamorous nightlife. In 1956 he was living in Oakville, Ontario, but he ventured back to Montreal as an illustrator-reporter to depict its club scene. Unusually, the outing was Cahén's idea, and drawings were made in advance of the text—a mark of the esteem publishers held him in.[5]

HIROSHIMA COVER ILLUSTRATION 1946

Oscar Cahén, Cover illustration for *Hiroshima* by John Hersey, published in *The Standard* magazine, September 28, 1946
Tearsheet, 40 x 30 cm
Location of original art unknown

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Because of his experience as a refugee, Cahén was often asked to illustrate war-related stories. Journalist John Hersey's recounting of Hiroshima's obliteration by nuclear attack on August 6, 1945 (first published in *The New Yorker*) describes the suffering of civilians from radiation in grisly detail. In what may be a research sketch, illustrated here, Cahén drew a horrifically injured woman. But *Hiroshima* required a treatment suitable for the newspaper's general audience–"Not too much blood, please!" the client pleaded.[1] The illustrations also had to solicit sympathy for the victims–no small feat given that Japan was regarded as the deserving enemy at the time. Additionally, Cahén had to work in a style that would translate well in solid colours on newsprint.

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (389), 1946, conté on paper, 54.6 x 34.3 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

Cahén chose to portray realistically proportioned figures free of caricature, rendered only in black line. The cover shows vulnerable people: an elderly man, hat respectfully held in his hand, and foraging women and children dwarfed by a wasted landscape. The menacing, abstract shape of twisted wreckage in the foreground not only indicates the force of the blast but also nods to Japanese woodcut design, where refined use of asymmetrical shapes to frame a scene and make an interesting formal composition is esteemed. Similar devices appear later in Cahén's abstract works.

Hiroshima was a major commission, including an additional fourteen spot-illustrations of survivors, wreckage, and rebuilding efforts, and four decorated capital letters. When the American literary agents saw Cahén's work, they wrote him to say that of all the illustration done for the eight hundred publications of *Hiroshima* worldwide, Cahén's were their favourite.[2]

ILLUSTRATION FOR "THE CALIFORNIAN'S TALE" 1947

Oscar Cahén, Illustration for "The Californian's Tale," by Mark Twain, published in *New Liberty*, January 24, 1947
60.6 x 44.8 cm
Private collection

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Oscar Cahén believed that illustration could and should stretch the public's aesthetic sophistication and that it was capable of embodying "those fundamental emotions which are expressed in good [fine] art work."[1] German Expressionism, to which Cahén would have been well exposed in Europe, and Gothic art, of which he collected reproductions, inform his distortions of figures for Mark Twain's tale about a heartbroken, mentally unsound old miner. Rendered in heavily outlined impasto gouache, the men enact a scene reminiscent of Gothic iconography in which a hollow-eyed, cadaver-like Jesus descends from the cross. The emaciated limbs and angular hands and feet of the Twain characters recall lost paintings by Cahén of a Belsen concentration camp victim and a drowned woman as well as his paintings of Christ and *Praying Man* of 1947.

Oscar Cahén, *Praying Man* (170), 1947, oil on canvas board, 59.7 x 49.3 cm, private collection.

New Liberty—which had just been acquired by Canadian publishers and made independent from the originating American publisher of *Liberty*—commissioned many such illustrations that were decidedly more outré than other periodicals would risk, probably because it helped them secure a distinct identity. The appearance of *The Californian's Tale* and others provoked complaints from readers: "Do you keep your illustrator Oscar in a padded cell? No one in their right mind could think up such repulsive and hideous things to represent human beings," jeered one.[2] But among Cahén's peers, the illustration for "The Californian's Tale" was well received. It was chosen for the 1949 exhibition of the Art Directors Club of Toronto by popular vote of its membership.[3]

The unnerving images Cahén drew for *New Liberty* marked an important turn in Canadian illustration where Canadians began to break with prettified American standards. These, and related Expressionist works such as *Praying Man*, 1947, led his friend James Imlach, who had moved to the United States, to say in 1948, "You [Cahén, Harold Town, and Walter Yarwood] can start a new and lively school of art in Canada devoid of the stiff realistic rendering of the British influence on the colonies."[4/sup>

THE ADORATION 1949

Oscar Cahén, *The Adoration*, 1949
Oil on Masonite, 122 x 133 cm
Private collection

"My ambition is to show people through my work that the fundamental thing is to have faith," said Cahén.[1] *The Adoration*, first shown at the Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Arts, 1950, and marked "Not for Sale," was Oscar Cahén's most ambitious work made prior to his turn to abstract painting. It depicts a traditional baby Jesus attended by Mary, Magi, and animals (and some untraditional others, such as the foreground figure bearing a lantern). However, the ethnically half-Jewish Cahén's actual religious identity remains enigmatic. A friend recalled, "He wished he could believe in God because he wanted so much to know the peace from believing. He made a thorough study of almost every religion in the world and had the uncomfortable habit of suddenly saying, 'Tell me, why do you believe in God?'"[2]

Later, Cahén was to say his abstract paintings were in part a search for faith;[3] perhaps figuration could not sufficiently address his spiritual questions. We might therefore think of *The Adoration* and other works with Christian subjects as allegories of universal themes rather than worshipful biblical illustrations. The prominent *hanukkiyah* (nine-candle menorah used during Hanukkah) in the lower left suggests that, as in the paintings of crucifixions by Marc Chagall (1887–1985), Cahén's depictions of Jesus's suffering might function as oblique comments on the persecution of Jews in general.[4/sup>

The Adoration brings Cahén's interest in the work of Georges Rouault (1871–1958) and Gothic-period German art together with Cubism. The planes and edges of *The Adoration*'s figures are hidden and revealed by a mosaic of interlocking, angular shapes. Bright colours, more than narrative, direct the viewer's eye from the yellow Star of Bethlehem to the picture's focal point, Jesus in Mary's hands. But the focal point is overwhelmed by the blinding whiteness of Mary's near-rectangular apron, signifying her purity. The resulting surface pattern and visual dominance of the relatively secondary status of the apron to the story anticipates Cahén's impending exploration of abstraction rather than illustration.

Oscar Cahén, *Crucifixion* (737), c. 1948, ink on illustration board, approx. 31 x 23 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

MACLEAN'S COVER ILLUSTRATION 1952

Oscar Cahén, Cover illustration for *Maclean's*, January 15, 1952
Tearsheet, 35 x 27 cm
Original in illustration in a private collection

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Oscar Cahén designed thirty-eight covers for *Maclean's*, then Canada's dominant national magazine. Magazine covers were prestigious because they allowed more freedom than most other kinds of illustration assignments; it was the artist's responsibility and privilege to come up with smart ideas, for which he or she was well compensated. Seen across the entire nation, sometimes framed to hang on people's walls, *Maclean's* covers were ideal for delivering an important message in the guise of a playful cartoon.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, *Rooster*, c. 1950–51, current location unknown. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, Cover illustration for *Maclean's*, October 15, 1951, rotogravure tearsheet. Original art in collection of The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

Cahén and his colleagues were confronting a Canadian art milieu that saw abstract art as mere "meaningless doodling."[1] During the 1951 exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA), conservative artists resigned in protest over the new swell of modern art. In press coverage of the controversy, Oscar Cahén's Expressionist *Rooster*, c. 1950–51, was singled out.[1] Consequently, Cahén designed this cover poking fun at a cliché of Canadian art: the wintery landscape, such as the Group of Seven had painted. In the illustration, the art gallery wall is lined with them, but the winter-weary visitors in their heavy clothing have eyes only for the one summer scene—marked *sold* with a red star.

In a related cover that ran a couple of months prior, Cahén designed a cover showing an artist insistently painting a traditional landscape while the world he is painting is unmistakably Cubist. The illustrator thus questions the assumption that a conventionally representational view of the world is always the "correct" one. In the corner appear the letters "N.M.O.S.A."—likely standing for "Non-Member of the Ontario Society of Artists."

Cahén often put personal subject matter into his illustrations: in one work his toddler son waits for Santa Claus, in another he eyes jam being cooked by his mother. The church that the artist paints here appears on several covers. According to the artist's son, Michael, it was inspired by a church in the (then) small village of King City on the outskirts of Toronto, where the Cahén family lived from 1947 to 1954.

ASCEND 1952

Oscar Cahén, *Ascend*, 1952
Watercolour, pastel, and charcoal on illustration board, 97.5 x 75.9 cm
Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Oscar Cahén had been experimenting with abstraction since at least 1949, but it was not until 1952 that he entered a completely abstract work, *Ascend*, into an Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) show. This was also the first of his exhibited pieces to adopt a verb for a title, inviting (or commanding) the viewer to engage with the painting as an experience rather than a thing. *Ascend*, coming on the heels of Cahén's exploration of Christian themes and just as he was entering a period of intense creative activity, conveys a powerful sense of rebirth.

The painterly drawing hints at upward movement with hard-edged vertical lines and shafts, the imperfectly rounded forms trapped in or escaping geometric confines. Contrasts of dark and light and illusions of transparency give an atmospheric impression of sun penetrating a gloomy place. The composition tautly suspends its shapes and lines in relation to the corners and sides of the canvas, each and every part vital to the balance and dynamism of the whole. This concern with design over the entirety is a departure from Cahén's prior tendency to use the edges of a work to merely frame a centred object.

Oscar Cahén, *Object d'Art*, c. 1953, oil on Masonite, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, private collection.

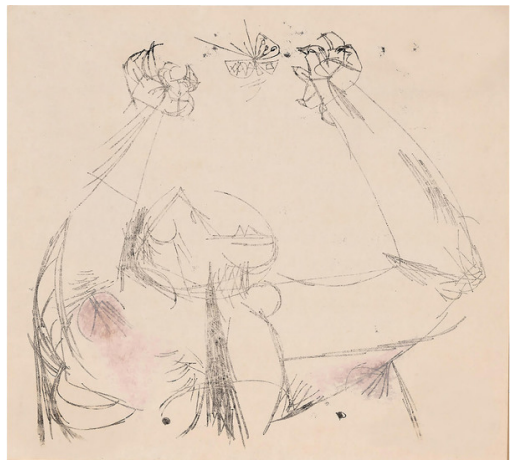
Cahén continued *Ascend*'s dramatic contrasts of dark and light in *Requiem*, c. 1953 (current location unknown), a canvas included in the prestigious 2nd Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, 1953–54; he rehearsed its basic structure again in *Object d'Art*, c. 1953. The latter's self-reflexive title, which was typical of many of his from this period, shows Cahén becoming interested in the materiality and status of artworks as artifacts. For the next few years the artist was preoccupied with paintings that treat their spaces as design problems to be solved with strict compartmentalizations defined with heavy, gestural lines and bold colours calculated to elicit an emotional response. *Ascend* marks the beginning of this important phase.

GROWING FORM 1953

Oscar Cahén, *Growing Form*, 1953
Oil on Masonite, 71.12 x 114.5 cm
RBC Corporate Art Collection

By 1953 Oscar Cahén was confidently painting many large abstracts in oil. He participated in ten exhibitions that year alone and eleven more in 1954. *Growing Form* was included in his first solo show, held at Hart House in Toronto in October 1954 at the invitation of the art committee there.[1] Conservative critic Hugh Thomson ridiculed the show, calling the paintings "vague" and "screw-ball," similar to "the work we used to do in kindergarten."[2]

Although he was exploring purely formalist problems at the time, *Growing Form* is typical of Cahén's ongoing interest in converting recognizable subject matter into emotionally resonant abstracted forms. Like other painters of the period, he was "fascinated" by popular British artist Graham Sutherland (1903–1980), whose thorny organic compositions had been recently shown in Toronto.[3] But Cahén had not simply adopted a trendy trope. For some time, he had been developing the motif of a barbed, upward-thrusting tall shape, crowned with a bloom of crescents.

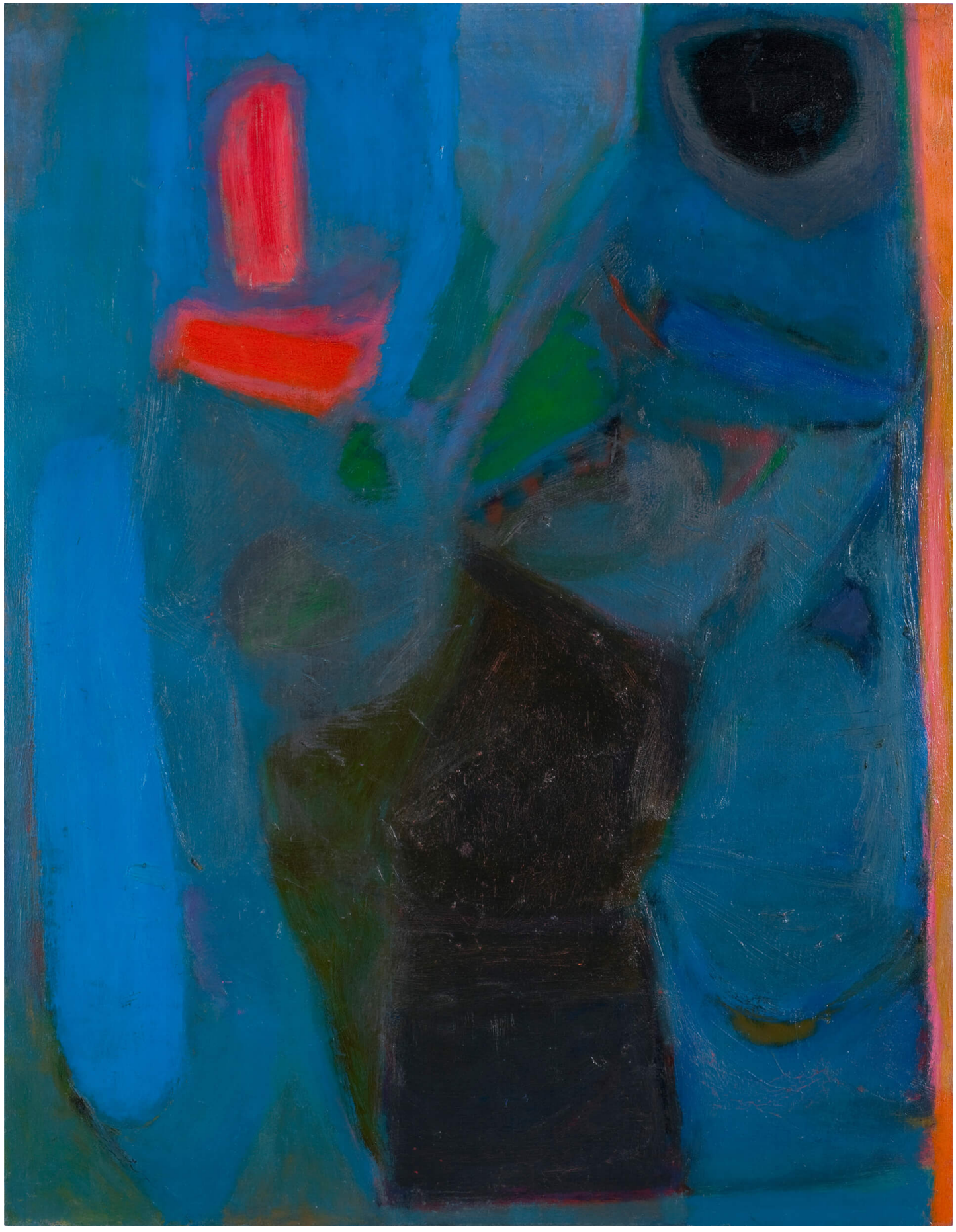


LEFT: Graham Sutherland, *Thorn Trees*, 1945, oil on cardboard, 108.6 x 101 cm, Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (405), c. 1952, monoprint and pastel, 58.4 x 61 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

In a number of illustrations, Cahén depicts thorny roses, and in his personal work he paints them in ink or in oil. In his illustrations he also frequently portrays a grasping hand that stands in for disease, for authorities stealing children, for fate, and other ominous concepts. In drawings he analyzes plants, hands, and heads for essential Cubist forms, as in *Untitled* (405), c. 1952, which shows a man's upturned, open-mouthed head emerging from neck and torso, arms raised. These mouths and hands become sharp, curved talons, beaks, and spurs in Cahén's multiple renditions of crowing and fighting cocks. Reduced to their most pure expressions, at times these subjects appear as simply a stick with a crescent at its end. In a work he captioned "Child Father and Mother," c. 1952–54, Cahén identified the stick-crescent as the "father."

Growing Form—from its provenance of forms jabbing, seizing, fighting, and crying out—is more than a tree or flower or simple stick and crescent. Rendered in intense reds with complementary teal and defiant black strokes, its florid, virile "growth" surges up like a fist, conveying a sense of challenge, a call to battle, and a recognition that transformation and flourishing growth accompany pain and suffering—that there is no rose without thorns.

SMALL COMBO 1954



Oscar Cahén, *Small Combo*, c. 1954
Oil on Masonite, 91.4 x 71.1 cm
Private collection

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Oscar Cahén is most often remembered for the way he used colour: like "a battering ram," as a critic said in 1954.[1] *Small Combo*, with a daring composition that emphasizes the right-hand edge of the painting as much as the centre, is one of a series of chromatic studies that stems from *Masque*, 1950, a breakthrough piece. Not only is *Masque* one of Cahén's first fully abstracted works, it is also, like *The Adoration*, 1949, before it, one of his earliest forays into deep, intense analogous colours—blues and greens—and the emotional register of blackened shades, punctuated by contrasting reds, pinks, and oranges.

Oscar Cahén, *Masque* (181), 1950, oil on Masonite, 76.2 x 50.8 cm, private collection.

The strategy of darkness pierced by light that is introduced in *The Adoration* and in *Masque*reaches maturity in *Small Combo*. Where these earlier paintings and other strongly coloured works such as *Growing Form*, 1953, emphasize drawn elements, *Small Combo* makes colour itself the subject matter: the scalding hot magenta-and-orange mixtures seem to jump off a background of midnight blues and blacks. But this is an illusion; in fact the cold, dark colours are the foreground, painted over Cahén's trademark tangerine and rose. As one looks, the force of the colour makes the foreground and background exchange places back and forth, keeping the picture plane animated.

Cahén was at the forefront of exploring the phenomenological effects of chroma, invoking joy, claustrophobia, sweetness, the sublime, hot, cold, or haunted feelings. In 1968 the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida, mounted a major exhibition of Cahén's oeuvre, and an American critic described the show in terms of sensual satisfaction: "a visual bash, an orgy for jaded eyes, a veritable feast."[2] Said fellow Painters Eleven member Tom Hodgson (1924–2006), "I can't think of anyone in any place, any country, any time who was a better colourist; I just thought [Cahén] was the best colourist anywhere."[3] *Small Combo* was exhibited in the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1955.[4]

ILLUSTRATION FOR "THE FIRST (AND LAST) OTTAWA STREET CAFÉ" 1955

Oscar Cahén, Illustration for "The First (and Last) Ottawa Street Café" by Ben Lappin, published in *Maclean's*, July 9, 1955
Gouache, watercolour, pencil; 42 x 99 cm
Original in The Cahén Archives

After the Second World War Canada relaxed its immigration policy, and people arrived from around the world. Magazines catered to the new readership with pieces about the Old World or about new Canadians and their tales of escape and acclimatization. Oscar Cahén was frequently chosen to illustrate such stories, as with "Little Jong is Brave as a Tiger," a six-scene sequential narrative that documents a Korean boy's heroism, done for *Weekend Magazine*.

Oscar Cahén, "Little Jong is Brave as a Tiger," *Weekend Magazine*, May 14, 1955, tearsheet. Original art and tearsheet in collection of The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

Cahén's elaborate street scene illustrating the memoir "The First (and Last) Ottawa Street Café" is a particularly excellent example of Cahén's powers of visual storytelling in one frame as opposed to using a sequence of panels. Employing body language not found in the suspense-less Korean sequence, the illustration depicts the tense moment when the writer's mother, who does not speak English, has found herself in trouble with the law over her innocent attempt to open a European-style sidewalk café. As in a theatrical scene, the dramatic event, the setting, and the characters are portrayed in such detail that one can guess what is going on without reading the text–yet be drawn into the story to find out what happens next.

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

Key to Cahén's success as an illustrator was his ability to depict personality and ethnicity without resorting to stereotypes: each of the twelve people (and two cats) has a highly individualized face and expression. Cultural backgrounds are only subtly hinted at: the Jewish man's *kippah*, the matron's ankle-length skirt and embroidered apron, the gingham tablecloths. Cahén personalizes the scene, as he did in several magazine illustrations, by scrawling "Oscar loves Mimi" (his wife) on the wall. Everyday familiar touches and behaviours–the paper boat in the gutter, the potted plant on the sill, the littlest child peeping shyly from the window, the worried senior on the right–and the wide-eyed, naive optimism of the son translating for the policeman–elicit sympathy for the European immigrants navigating Ottawa's uptight environs. Especially effective is Oscar's strategy of showing us only the policeman's back–his anonymity not only represents the faceless state, it focuses the viewer's attention on the personalities of the community rather than on the officer's judgment of them.

Oscar Cahén, detail of *The First (and Last) Ottawa Street Café*. Cahén's personal message "Oscar Loves Mimi" is scrawled on the cornerstone.

UNTITLED (040) 1955

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (040), c. 1955
Oil and felt pen on canvas, 76.2 x 91.4 cm
Private collection

Oscar Cahén often reworked his oil paintings many times before he was satisfied. In contrast, *Untitled* (040), c. 1955, is a swift, confident, and immediate work. Cahén intuitively renders sharply delineated elements with thin orange, red, and pink oil paint, and a new medium, felt pen (the pen ink was likely black, now faded to brown). Unlike oils, felt pen permitted no chance to alter a single mark or line. This strategy of impulsive artmaking with no editing originated in the Surrealist technique of automatism, which artists hoped would facilitate access to the unconscious and thus achieve more original creativity and self-knowledge.

Untitled (040) leaves bare primed canvas showing as if it were paper. The forms play with the nuanced distinction between painting and drawing. The solid mass of the large shape on the left is drawn with the felt pen– while the ovoid shapes on the right are not masses but merely outlines encircling weightless, empty spaces. The diagonal thrusts of the centre lines and the slant of the other forms give the work a dynamic appearance, as if all the elements were in motion. Yet their careful placement with a balanced distribution of white space between each object suggests deliberate design, as if someone had hit a "pause" button at just the right moment, resulting in a suspenseful tension between movement and stasis, accident and intent.

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (077), 1953, watercolour, ink, resist, monoprint, 50.8 x 66 cm, private collection.

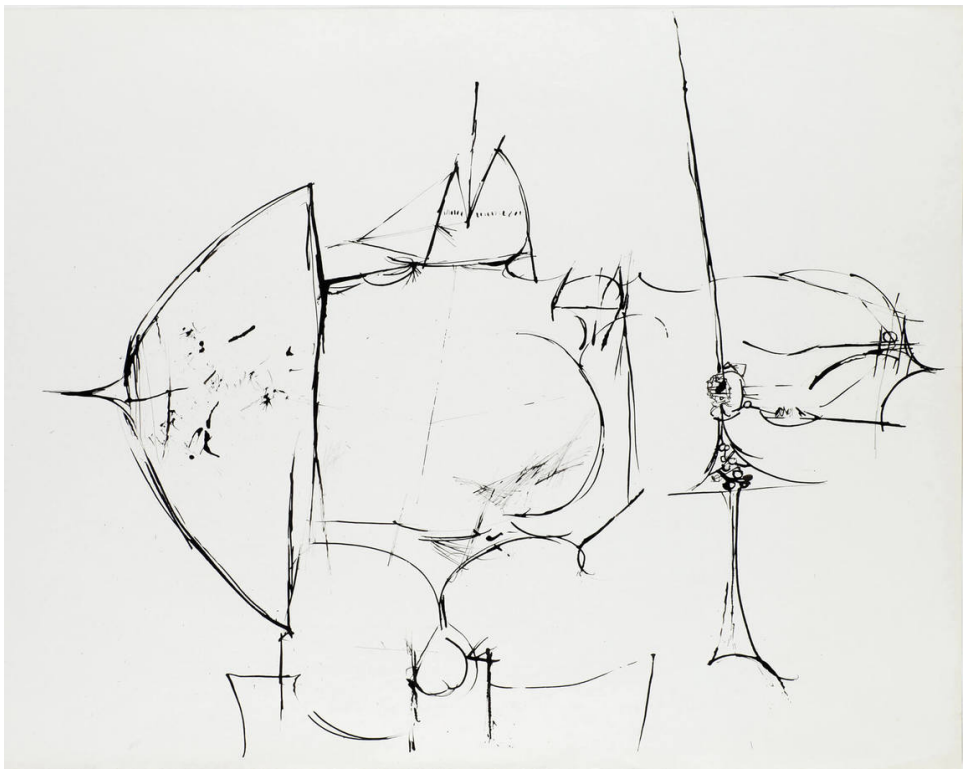
Although the forms in *Untitled* (040) are ambiguous, the shapes on the right can be read as bird-like. Cahén had a long-time interest in birds, painting roosters several times, and peacocks, doves, songbirds, and fantastical birds such as *Untitled* (077), 1953. Although he left no record of what birds meant to him, they fit with his frequent themes of growth, vitality, and freedom.

WARRIOR 1956

Oscar Cahén, *Warrior*, 1956
Oil on canvas, 201.7 x 260.6 cm
Private collection on loan to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Oscar Cahén's largest painting, *Warrior*, abandons the formalist abstract works he was concurrently developing and reaches back into his earlier repertoire concerning the human condition. In 1952 he had shown an abstract ink drawing with gold leaf titled *Two Warriors and One of Their Little Machines*, and before that, soldiers appeared in crucifixion scenes and illustrations. The old themes of suffering Cahén had explored in the late 1940s never left him, for in October 1956 he exhibited *Grief*—a couple consoling one another—rendered in black, grey, and brown oil on board.[1]

Cahén's personal experience with men caught in war was fraught with contradictions: his father, voluntarily mobilizing his underground anti-Nazi operation, was one kind of warrior; the thousands of average men (Nazi and Ally) conscripted to fight to their doom were another; and Christ was a warrior in a pacifist way. Cahén explored the victims of warriors (who themselves could be failed warriors) in images of prisoners, refugees, and an amputee, as in *The Cripple* (date unknown). In *The Criminal* (date unknown) the subject's hanging head and dangling arms make him appear more pitiable than guilty, a position analogous to Cahén's when Czech police had caught him with anti-Nazi broadcasting equipment, and later when he was deemed an "enemy alien" and interned during the Second World War.



Oscar Cahén, *Sketch for Warrior* (050), 1955–56, ink on paper, 86.2 x 106.7 cm, private collection.

Cahén made four related one-metre-wide, black-ink line drawings. Each shows a soldier brandishing a lance with one arm, the other holding a shield. Heads take the form of medieval helmets, and massive, angular greaves protect calves. The block-like torsos lack detail, although each is given a prominent round codpiece.

Bigger than life-size, *Warrior* was rendered savagely in about four swift passes: the first, a line drawing in black paint on raw canvas, followed by staining of the background and colouring of the chest, head, and greaves. Then the impasto flesh-tones of a vulnerably bloated, naked torso were laid in, a penis-less scrotum where the codpiece used to be. The powerful lance-wielding arms found in the drawings are now puny weak things—like the arm of the figure in *The Cripple*—holding only a knife in an upright ceremonial way, as the King does on a playing card. The shield oppressively squashes the figure's shoulder, with an effeminate pale pink field crowding in from the left.

This castrated figure in *Warrior*, its head now shattered as if by an explosion, is a testament to the victimhood of "warriors" (conscripted soldiers) forced to participate in conflicts not of their making. With the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Cold War so fresh, *Warrior* functions as an archetype as expressive of the period as any abstract painting. Cahén's friends Walter Yarwood (1917–1996) and Harold Town (1924–1990) hung *Warrior* in pride of place on the title wall of the *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition* at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1959.

MULTI-PART MURAL FOR IMPERIAL OIL EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING
1956

Oscar Cahén, Multi-part Mural, Staff Lounge and Cafeteria of the Imperial Oil Executive Office Building, Toronto, 1956
Installation view of central panel from period photograph (cropped on the right) Acrylic on canvas, approximately 294.6 x 670.6 cm
Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

In 1955 construction began on Imperial Oil's executive offices at 111 St. Clair Avenue West, in Toronto, a landmark high-rise that accommodated 1,200 people. Three Toronto artists were commissioned to design murals for it: Oscar Cahén was awarded the eighth-floor cafeteria and lounge area, while York Wilson (1907–1984) and Sydney H. Watson (1911–1981) painted the foyer and boardroom murals, respectively.[1] It was a highly prestigious assignment, for which Cahén was paid a princely $7,200 (a man working in manufacturing made about $5,000 a year).[2] He completed the commission just days before his death on November 26, 1956.

Installation view of panels Cahén painted for the staff lounge and cafeteria of the Imperial Oil Executive Office Building, Toronto, 1956.

Cahén's nature-derived, curvilinear design for three sections of wall and posts directly contrasts with the grey building's mercenary International Modern structure with its even grid of windows. Intended to enliven this space of leisure, Cahén's barb and crescent forms interact playfully with wide fields of

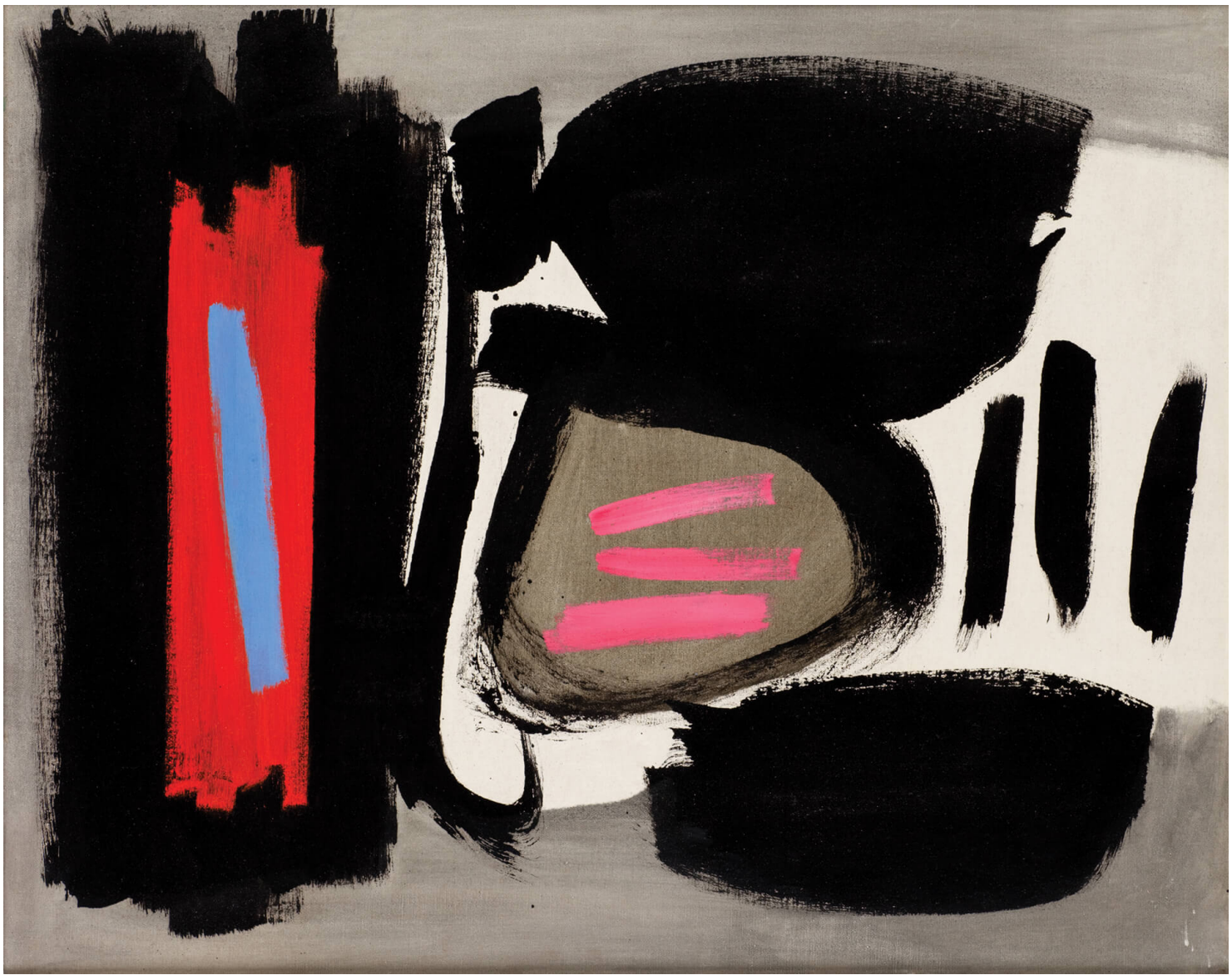
pastel and vivid colours. The motif of a sun brightens the dim middle of the vast, proportionally low-ceilinged room. Critic Robert Fulford opined that Cahén "provided by far the most human touch to the new Imperial Oil building . . . it's one of the best Canadian murals I've seen and it may be the best work of Cahén's career."[3] Harold Town (1924–1990) thought that the mural broke with Cahén's previous influences and "placed him, for the first time, in an arena which was entirely his own."[4]

The even, flat, hard-edged application of paint here eliminates Cahén's characteristic calligraphic brushwork for the first time. Partly this may reflect that the mural is an architectural feature: Cahén's design of several parts creates an installation that shapes a three-dimensional spatial environment—as opposed to making the mural a two-dimensional *objet d'art* as a decorative backdrop. Yet the flatness and composition of the mural segments still bear similarities to washes of watercolours and ink that Cahén was concurrently producing, such as *Untitled* (368), c. 1955–56. Less personality is conveyed in these, and more attention to formal properties of colour, shape, space, and juxtaposition. After Cahén's death, other artists, such as Cahén's fellow Painters Eleven member Jack Bush (1909–1977), would go on to develop similar approaches, in colour-field painting and what New York critic Clement Greenberg termed Post-Painterly Abstraction.

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (368), c. 1955–56, ink, watercolour, resist on illustration board, 55.9 x 71.1 cm, private collection.

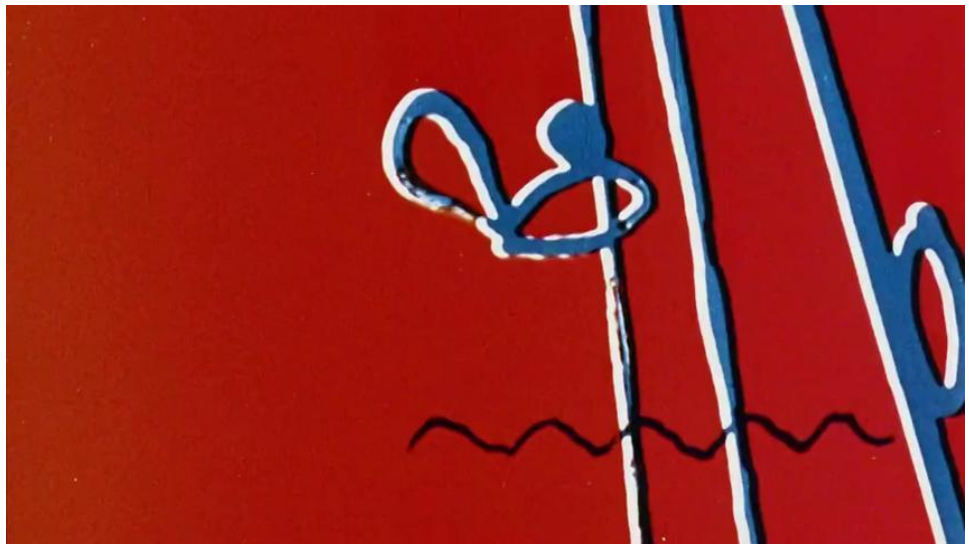
Two of the mural sections were saved in 1979 before impending renovations and now await conservation; the third large mural and smaller sections on posts are presumed lost. The original mural panels are 258.8 x 904 cm, 297 x 685 cm, and approximately 294.6 x 670.6 cm.

UNTITLED (384) 1956



Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (384), 1956
Oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm
Private collection

By 1956 Painters Eleven members were well aware of the New York Abstract Expressionists. Oscar Cahén's *Untitled* (384), 1956, is kin to the foreboding masses of Robert Motherwell (1915–1991), the abstracted symbols of Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974), and the draftsmanly constructions by Franz Kline (1910–1962). Like theirs, Cahén's painting retains a calligraphic flair, its hasty-looking yet deliberate black swashes resembling hieroglyphs. But Cahén chose to work at a more intimate size than the grandiose formats made for soaring white wall space favoured by the New Yorkers. Less than a metre wide, Cahén's painting is scaled for the average home or office, where it would provide a focal point among furniture, windows, books, and ashtrays.



Norman McLaren, *Boogie Doodle*, 1941, National Film Board of Canada. *Boogie Doodle* is an animated film made without the use of a camera, in which "boogie" played by Albert Ammons and "doodle" drawn by Norman McLaren combine to make a rhythmic, brightly coloured film experiment.

Such a setting would invite long, frequent contemplation by its owner, allowing him or her to form a personal relationship with the artwork. Its hieroglyphic touches supply the "escape from loneliness through communication" that Cahén intended his abstract painting to perform.[1] The dry brush marks are telltale painterly spoor, indices to precisely how the artist's hand moved and at what speed. The viewer, hunting for meaning, responds viscerally, vicariously experiencing the touching of brush to canvas, the springy push-back of the stretched cotton, the rough nap grabbing the pigment, the simultaneous slipperiness and stickiness of the oil.

The composition's tripartite patterns are like drumbeats: three dashes in black; three dashes in pink; three rounded forms floating one above the other; three slashes in black, red, and blue. It recalls deconstructed musical notation reminiscent of the jazz Cahén loved. Through the beat of brushstrokes, the shocking red and pink and blue that blare like horns, the painting calls heart and soul to respond. Its drama arises from an evocation of ephemerality: each graffito hovers over the grey and white underpainting as if caught just before bouncing away like an echo. The relation between paint on canvas and sound and movement paralleled the recent abstract animations to jazz tracks by Norman McLaren (1914–1987). These films were shown in 1952 at an abstract art exhibition that included two works by Cahén.[2] Fittingly, McLaren was awarded the first Oscar Cahén Memorial Award by the Art Directors Club of Toronto in 1957, for personal and genuine creativity over a long period.[3]

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Oscar Cahén lived a brief but intense life. Although he worked in Canada for only fourteen years and exhibited his paintings for a scant eight, his role in the development of both illustration and abstract painting in Canada was pivotal. He gave fellow artists and designers confidence to experiment and to stand up to conservative backlash, setting an inspirational example with his engaging art.

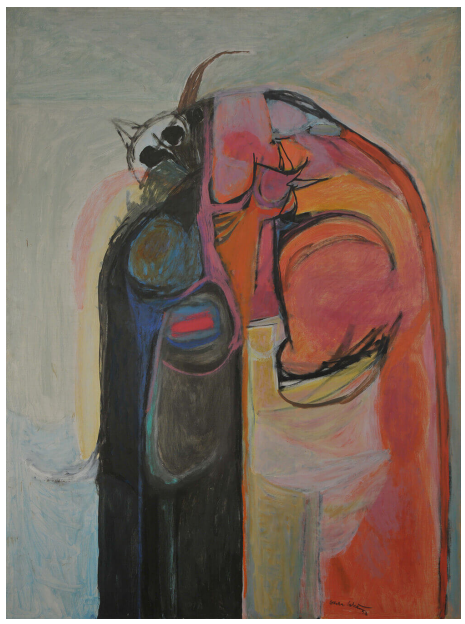
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE

After his death, Oscar Cahén's oeuvre and personal papers were not available for many years, and not much was known about his life, creative process, and thoughts on art. As a result, comparatively little in-depth research on him has been completed, and the assessment of Cahén's contribution to Canadian art and design has been largely based on people's fond memories and on erroneous reports (some given by the artist himself, some from faulty journalism, some from well-intentioned but mistaken friends). Recently, Oscar's only child, Michael Cahén, has done much to right the situation by establishing The Cahén Archives, which now enables scholarship to proceed. New research has corrected much of the record and is confirming that Oscar Cahén played an instrumental part in revitalizing illustration and legitimizing abstract art in Canada.

Oscar Cahén at an easel, 1951. Photograph by Page Toles.

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove



Oscar Cahén, *Animal Structure*, 1953, oil on Masonite, 122 x 91.4 cm, Museum London.

As a visual communicator bound up in networks of social alliances, business, institutions, and technologies, the artist is a mediator of the zeitgeist, uniquely positioned to select some elemental idea and re-present it to the community in new contexts, renewing, adjusting, or inventing meaning in the process. Oscar Cahén did not theorize about painting very much, preferring instead to act instinctively. When asked what his abstract pictures meant, he retorted: "Why don't you go out and ask a bird what his song means? I'm not interested in telling a story . . . when I paint, I set down the pushing and pulling of my emotions."[1] But his friend Harold Town (1924–1990) saw in Cahén's work a "voracious appetite for living . . . [expressed in] joyous colour . . . [and] forms that suggest growth in exultant upward thrust . . . a sense of his deep concern with the life force."[2] This expression of surviving and thriving encapsulates not just Cahén's life but also Canadians' postwar energy and rapid economic and cultural development.

"Painting can be capable of transmitting emotions beyond the representational value therein, and consequently [can] influence the onlooker," Cahén wrote. Visual power in media could "contribute actively towards the cultural development of our society."[3] Born during the First World War, coming of age in the Nazi era, and living during a period of enormous social and technological change, he was well placed to express the times: as an editorial illustrator of war and daily life; as a painter of themes of trauma and rebirth; as a producer of abstract works that were said at the time to be expressive of modern life.

BABIES
FOR
EXPORT

ALBERTA'S TRAGIC TRAFFIC IN BABIES

by Harold Dingman

READING TIME • 14 MINUTES 25 SECONDS

ONE of the blackest and ugliest chapters in the development of modern governments has been written in the province of Alberta. It is the unparalleled story of a government that sells illegitimate babies, exporting them to foreign homes; and the further story of unjustifiably slow and delinquent care of Alberta's very young and very old. All these extremes of life bureaucracy and tyranny rule.

It is a humiliating story, for that has defamed a proud and resourceful people. Alberta is the largest and loveliest of the provinces of the plains and is probably the richest area in the Dominion in its developed and potential resources. Sunny Alberta has everything—coal, oil, wheat, cattle, and water power; and, above all, its people are strong-minded and independent.

In its 43 years of responsible government the young province has tried more varied politics than any other province—Conservative, Liberal, Farmer, and now Social Credit. Some 800,000 progressive people control and direct a quarter million square miles of great natural wealth.

Suddenly, out of this unique province has come the disturbing story of maladministration of child welfare, the absence of child protection, of baby exports to such distant points as California and South America and Alaska; of mothers pressured into giving up their babies before they even see them.

Who, me, all this? No sensation-seeking, politically inspired group. The whole black chapter was prepared and written by the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire, Alberta Provincial Chapter.

This New Liberty story has nothing to do with the theory or the politics of the Social Credit Party; it concerns itself only with the power and authority of one subagency of that government. And it is highly unlikely that anyone would ascribe political motives to the I.O.D.E. As a matter of fact, in Ottawa, where this article was written, the government of Alberta is regarded as one of the better provincial administrations in Canada.

The Daughters of the Empire were, in fact, slow to anger. Early in World War II the Order became disturbed over what was happening to children and old folk

December 27, 1947

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, illustration for "Babies For Export," by Harold Dingman, *The Standard*, December 27, 1947, tearsheet, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Praying Man* (170), 1947, oil on canvas board, 59.7 x 49.3 cm, private collection.

Cahén's illustrations run from the documentary to the wholly imaginative. Even the most whimsical give insight into daily events, into the things people wore and had in their homes, and into their relationships. With his commercial illustration, Cahén affected public opinion and social values by means of charm or horror. His illustration for an investigative journalism article on the alleged trafficking of babies of unwed mothers in Alberta features a menacing claw reaching toward a despondent woman, rendered in a flattened, hard-edged and angular manner. One reader complained, "The drawings . . . resemble the doodlings of a surrealist the morning after."[4]

In the paintings of suffering figures or with religious themes that Cahén painted from 1946 to 1951, such as *Praying Man*, some viewers see an archetypal expression of communal Jewish experience.[5] It remains to be seen how much of Cahén's point of view can be ascribed to his part-Jewish ethnicity; when filling out forms, he always gave his religion as "none." Yet whether Cahén thought of himself as part-Jewish or not, he had been treated like a Jew in Europe and in the British and Canadian refugee camps, and he maintained a connection to Toronto's sizeable and culturally important Jewish community through friendships with other ex-interns and his work on the largely Jewish-staffed *Magazine Digest*. Given the systemic oppression of Jewish people in Canada during the postwar period, it can be argued that some of Cahén's works were superficially aimed at general audiences but were subtly coded for a different reading by those who understood his background more intimately. The scarlet circle on the back of a jacket in a *Maclean's* illustration—a reference to the internment camp Cahén endured—can be read as one such coded message. Images such as *Praying Man*, 1947, which was accepted to the 1947 Ontario Society of Artists exhibition, spoke to a general postwar audience as easily as to an individual or a defined group because, like his depictions of Christ, it captured lament and rejuvenation at the same time.

Oscar Cahén, illustration for short story, "Mail," by John Norman Harris, *Maclean's*, 1950. Prisoners in internment camps wore denim jackets with large, red circles on the back. The circles were targets for armed guards if a prisoner attempted to escape.

For its fans, abstract art signified Canada's growing equivalence to the cultural sophistication of the United States and Europe. Modern artists' experimentation met with the optimism and affluence of the postwar period when Canadians' receptivity to new art forms was cracking open. At the same time, the Cold War was descending, bringing with it rampant fears of communism and nuclear weapons. Meanwhile the trauma of returning veterans, the acceleration of transportation, communication, and business, and advances in science were affecting everyday life and adding new stresses. In art, people were preoccupied with the idea that old ways of painting could not adequately reflect such a changed society.

Oscar Cahén, *Traumoeba*, 1956, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm, private collection.

The disorienting break with the past alongside lingering memories of the Depression and Second World War atrocities meant that expressions of feeling in colour, rhythm, and shapes allowed for more personal interpretation and processing of emotion than did realistic depictions. Take, for example, the radiantly thrusting *Traumoeba*, 1956, whose title amalgamates the word *trauma*, the German word *traum* (dream), and the word *amoeba*. The licence of the artist to act outside of convention symbolized the right of all individuals to self-determination in a democratic society. Yet Cahén's paintings frequently brought chaos under the yoke of design, containing his wild gestures and vibrating colour combinations in taut, compartmentalized, carefully balanced compositions. Cahén's work can be seen to signify a humanistic hope for a kind of orderly freedom of expression in a tolerant, progressive Canada.[6]

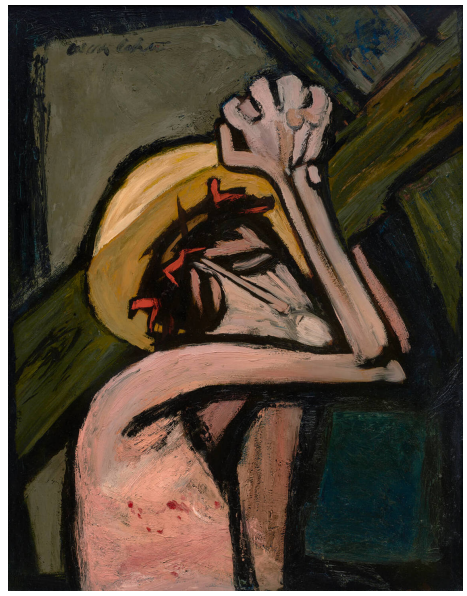
RECEPTION IN DESIGN

After only four years as a paid commercial artist, Oscar Cahén was already "generally considered one of the best freelancers in Canada."[7] Canadian art books first mention him in 1950 and 1952.[8] Between 1949 and 1957, he received five medals and six awards for illustration, and his work was featured in the New York Art Directors' annual exhibition and in several European design journals.[9] Canada's most accomplished designer, Carl Dair (1912–1967), noted that Cahén held a "pre-eminent position."[10]

Art Director Gene Aliman and Oscar Cahén at the Art Directors Club annual exhibition, 1955, looking at Cahén's silver-medal-winning illustration for "What It's Like to See," *Maclean's*.

Cahén's biography parallels that of émigré artists in the United States such as Marcel Breuer (1902–1981), Leo Lionni (1910–1999), and Max Weber (1881–1961). Some scholars have supposed that Cahén must have been, like them, a conduit for transmission of European modernism.[11] However, it is difficult to gauge his actual experience with Cubism, Expressionism, or the Bauhaus teachings because little is yet confirmed about what he saw before coming to Canada in 1940. But no matter what his actual intimacy with experimental art was, by 1947 Cahén was exhibiting an Expressionist canvas at the Ontario Society of Artists' annual exhibition, and his oil painting *Christus,* c. 1949–50, was held up in the press as the most quintessentially modernist work in a 1950 Royal Canadian Academy exhibition.[12]

By 1950 Cahén was sending Canadian illustration samples by his peers to the prestigious *Graphis*magazine in Zurich, thus forming a tangible link between the Canadian artists and Europe.[13] His role as a trans-Atlantic intermediary, his proclivity for calling most slick advertising art "American junk," and his belief in the power and social responsibility of commercial artists[14] fit with the rhetoric of the postwar design reformers who wanted Canada to prosper along modernist, anti-American lines.[15] He figured in design criticism as an example of Canadian sophistication that was consistent with the movement toward the professionalization of graphic design along international—meaning European, especially Scandinavian and Swiss—lines. As art director Stan Furnival (1913–1980) was to say in 1959, "With a sense of freedom and vitality, [Cahén's illustrations] radically changed a tight slick Americanized attitude almost overnight. . . . Oscar realized that Canada was probably the only country left in the world where a fresh, alive influence would not only be accepted, but praised and honoured."[16]



Oscar Cahén, *Christus* (322), c. 1949–50, oil on Masonite, 91.4 x 71.1 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

A less politically invested view today must concede that Cahén's illustration was more culturally hybridized than his contemporaries cared to admit. Although his work initially appeared "typically European,"[17] he had already absorbed American illustration in Prague and Germany, where Americana was in vogue,[18] and it is more accurate to say that he combined European, American, and Canadian influences.

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (128), 1938, watercolour, gouache, and graphite on illustration board, 35.9 x 26 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

Nevertheless, the design awards he won from juries of his peers were based firmly on his technical and creative prowess, not his ethnicity. Cahén certainly impressed everyone with virtuosity: junior artists delighted in timing how fast he could whip off a figure (about seven minutes).[19] Younger illustrators Gerry Sevier (b. 1934) and Tom McNeely (b. 1935) kept his work pinned up in their studio.[20] A letter from art director Dick Hersey (dates unknown) once advised Harold Town (1924–1990), "[Your] drawing is too involved, also highly reminiscent of Oscar. I prefer to go to the source."[21] Since the first exhibition of Cahén's illustration art in 2011, and with the circulation of the exhibition's catalogue, a new following of contemporary illustrators and comics artists has begun to grow.[22]

RECEPTION AMONG PAINTERS ELEVEN AND OTHERS

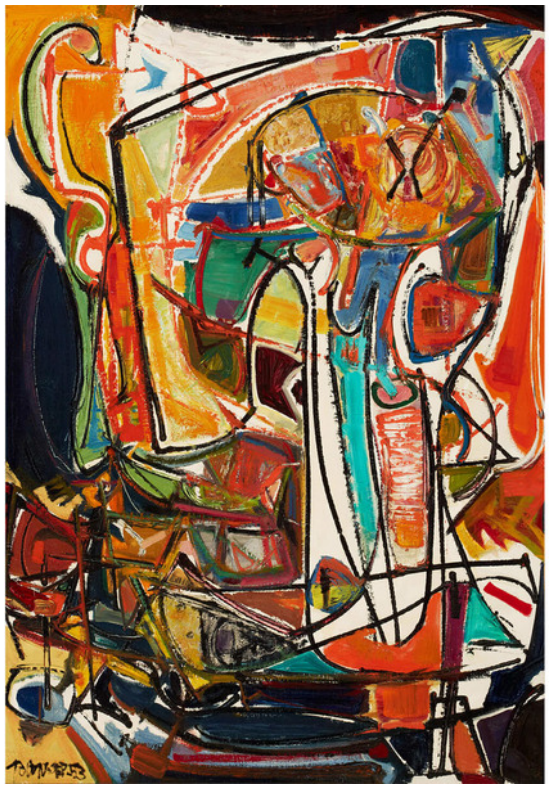
Oscar Cahén's memory is inevitably linked to his participation in Painters Eleven, an artists' group whose promotion of abstract painting and artistic freedom was described by critic Paul Duval in 1957 as having "performed a service for Canadian art."[23] What Cahén brought to the group, member Jack Bush (1909–1977) stated, was "a wonderful sense of European colour and daring, but with it was also the wonderful tolerance and understanding."[24] Again owing to his background, Cahén held a powerful place in Painters Eleven, for he helped give the group a semblance of international flair that set them apart. When countering accusations that Painters Eleven was derivative of the New York School, for instance, member Ray Mead (1921–1998) could conveniently point out that Cahén's paintings looked "German."[25] Cahén once more acted as trans-Atlantic intermediary, helping member Jock Macdonald (1897–1960) scout opportunities for a Painters Eleven show in Europe by writing to venues in Germany.[26] Cahén's foreign identity gave the Painters Eleven group an air of authenticity, authority, and legitimacy that commanded respect in the face of the snide remarks their abstracts received in much of the press. Through Cahén, a European flavour was thought by one critic to have been passed on to Toronto painters at large.[27]

Jack Bush, *The Old Tree*, 1951, oil on hardboard, 43.2 x 55.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © Estate of Jack Bush / SODRAC (2015). Like Cahén, Jack Bush began his career as an illustrator and realist painter and made the transition to abstract painting in the early 1950s.

Many historians and critics have found that Cahén—nicknamed "Doc" by his friends for unknown reasons[28]—commanded considerable influence in Painters Eleven and among other Toronto artists.[29] Some have compared his role to that of the eminent Jock Macdonald; fellow member Tom Hodgson (1924–2006) even felt that "Cahén was by far the giant of the group," although it had no leader per se.[30] Upon hearing of Oscar Cahén's death, the artist Toni Onley (1928–2004) wrote, "Some did not always agree on his departure in painting, but he taught us to re-examine ourselves—and thinking, find a mind's-eye—and through this his boundless imagination and resourcefulness has rubbed off on us young painters."[31]

LEFT: Tom Hodgson, *It Became Green*, 1956, oil on canvas, 242.7 x 100.9 cm, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Object d'Art*, c. 1953, oil on Masonite, 121.9 x 91.4 cm, private collection.

Cahén is especially recognized for his colour. First noted in 1952 to be "subtle,"[32] his palette then underwent a shift, and the words used to describe it—astonishing, unexpected, striking, intense, joyous, peculiar, eccentric, and uncommon—demonstrate that for Torontonians of the early 1950s this new colouration was unusual. Jack Bush noted that Cahén introduced a pastel palette into Toronto.[33] In one of the more critically rigorous pieces written in the period, Clare Bice asserts that "the spirit of OC still dominates and motivates the group," and accuses other members of producing "derivative exercises . . . reflecting the dominant inspiration of Cahén"—two years after he had died.[34] Scholars have found that Cahén had a particular impact upon Harold Town (1924–1990), Jack Bush, Tom Hodgson, Ray Mead, and Walter Yarwood (1917–1996).[35] The competitive instinct in both Town and Cahén stimulated each,[36] and Cahén's passing interest in printmaking also spurred Town into exploring that medium.[37] Upon news of Cahén's death, William Ronald (1926–1998) told Jock Macdonald privately, "When I was attending college I would eagerly await the arrival of each local exhibition to see Oscar's latest work. He was working in a creative manner in a mature way and on a grand scale before most of us."[38] According to Mead, Cahén "used dyes on large sheets of paper, and his drawings. It had a bit of influence on all of us. You could say a bit of Oscar would turn up in all of us eventually."[39]



LEFT: Harold Town, *Day Neon*, 1953, oil on Masonite, 91.1 x 63.5 cm, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. RIGHT: Walter Yarwood, *Cathedral*, c. 1960, oil on canvas laid on Masonite, 107 x 122.3 cm, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.

A CAREER CUT SHORT

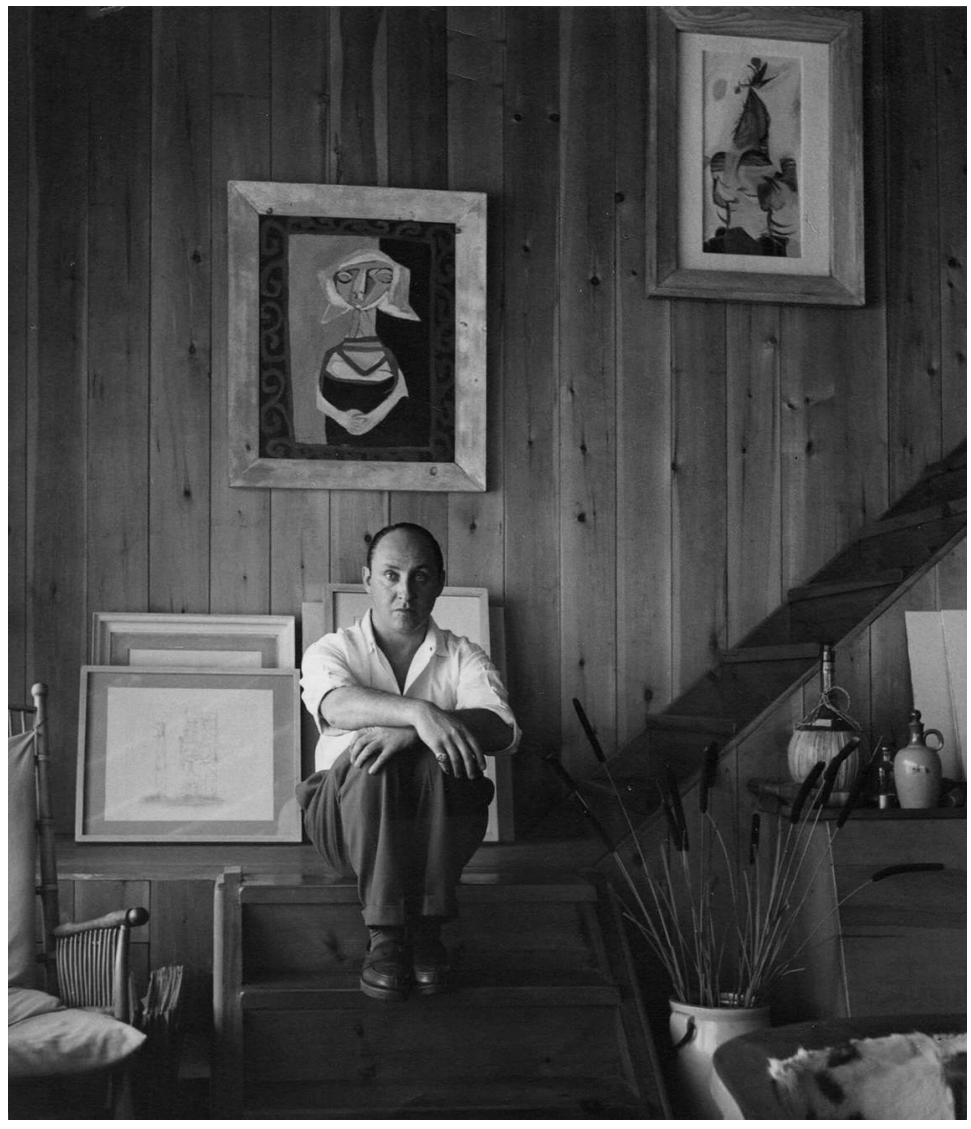
In 1975 Oscar Cahén was posthumously awarded the Royal Canadian Academy Medal to honour his contribution to Canadian art. The Canadian Association Of Professional Image Creators (CAPIC) awarded their Lifetime Achievement Award to Cahén in 1988.

Attempts to hypothesize Cahén's unrealized future are irresistible. But should one indulge? In the catalogue of the 1983–84 Oscar Cahén retrospective, David Burnett wisely advises not to focus on what Cahén might have done had he lived longer, because the fictional masterpieces we extrapolate in our imagination will always unfairly diminish the works he did leave us[40]—paintings such as *Subjective Image,* c. 1954, which summarizes Cahén's dramatic colour sense and characteristic iconography in a succinct composition.

Oscar Cahén, *Subjective Image*, c. 1954, oil on canvas laid on Masonite, 121.9 x 106.7 cm, collection of Jim and Melinda Harrison.

It is exactly such speculation that can lead one, mulling over Cahén's diverse works and early death, to conclude that he might not have reached artistic maturity. But here the concept of "maturity" is flawed: it assumes the artist must refine and sustain a unique mode of self-expression. This expectation has been greatly promoted by the art market, which thrives when an artist becomes known for an easily spotted, brand-like "signature style." The risk is that this bias could oversimplify or erase aspects of the artist's full range of art activities and quash promising but unfashionable creative potential.

A narrow, focused effort is not valid for all artists—Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), for instance, never stayed in any one vein of work. Cahén remained ever curious, pressing visual exploration in all directions, returning as needed to earlier and concurrently developing forms. Cahén's bodies of work can be considered complete and interrelated entities rather than sequential steps toward some unrealized goal. That Cahén's own peers in the 1950s accepted them as advanced accomplishments rather than preparatory trials should satisfy us today that his quality is stable and consistent, a factor that transcends mere stylistic constancy.



Portrait of Oscar Cahén on the staircase of his home in 1951. Cahén's *16th Century Lady*, 1948, and *Rooster*, c. 1950–51, are hanging on the wall in the background. Photograph by Page Toles.

It is the strength and fecundity of the artworks Oscar Cahén left us that validate his multi-disciplinary approach as a fully rounded visual research methodology. The "tremendous scope of his magnificent painting talent," as one reviewer put it in 1960,[41] is what make him a pivotal figure in Canadian art, and it is the contribution by which we may appreciate him most.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

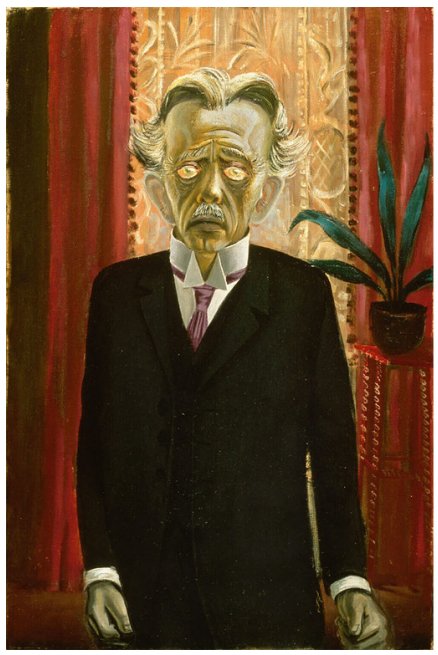
Oscar Cahén became famous for his facility as a draftsman, his innovation in a multitude of media, and his use of vivid colour. As a cartoonist and illustrator, he interpreted hundreds of stories in an ever-changing range of visual languages. In his painting he conveyed monumentality and passion.

OSCAR CAHÉN

Life & Work by Jaleen Grove

EUROPEAN ROOTS

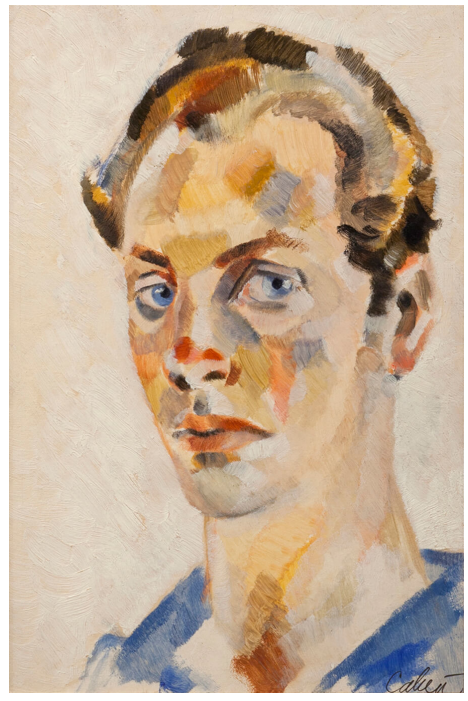
Oscar Cahén's formative years were spent in artistic milieux characterized by great diversity of style and approach. In the Dresden of 1932, the German avant-garde turned to the Neue Sachlichkeit movement, which for proponent Otto Dix (1891–1969) meant turning back to Northern Renaissance altarpieces and highly detailed traditional techniques for inspiration. Dix was concerned with social commentary, as were many other German artists of the 1930s, including George Grosz (1893–1959), whose distorted, debauched figures related to Germany's strong tradition of caricature. At the same time, the lessons of the Bauhaus art school—such as the famous maxim "Less is more!"—influenced what young designers like Cahén were taught.[1]



LEFT: Otto Dix, *Portrait of Dr. Heinrich Stadelmann*, 1922, oil on canvas, 90.8 x 61.0 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © Estate of Otto Dix / SODRAC (2015). RIGHT: George Grosz, *The Hero*, 1933, lithograph on paper, 40.4 x 28.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Cahén's versatility was further developed in Prague, where émigré artists such as Dadaist John Heartfield (1891–1968) gathered. Artists were encouraged to diversify: graduates of the Rotter School of Advertising Art, where Oscar Cahén worked in 1937, pursued combinations of graphic design, painting, glass, film, children's book illustration, photography, theatre design, and editorial illustration.[2]

As a young painter Cahén seems to have been more interested in the psychology of portraiture, and in recording contemporary lifestyles and places, than in challenging the definition of "art" or breaking down form. He applied contemporary touches to traditional forms: his early moody-looking self-portrait, conventionally drawn and modelled, shows a proto-Cubist sensibility with Post-Impressionist colour reminiscent of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). The "meticulously executed" drawings he exhibited alongside his portraits and landscapes portray "the superficial life of the big city . . . lively girls with high hats, stockings, and walking sticks."[3] In 1940 art historian Otto Demus wrote that Oscar Cahén was difficult to classify because of his "*Allerweltstalent*"—universal talent—but that "decorative improvisation" was his strength; the "right" Cahén was to be found in jazz band drawings rather than in his "too-smooth portraits."[4] Cahén was to fight against his prowess at almost slick drawing for the remainder of his career,[5] always looking for more immediate, original ways to express his inner feelings.



Oscar Cahén, *Self-portrait*, c. 1930–40, oil on board, 36 x 25 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. As a young painter Cahén seems to have been more interested in the psychology of portraiture than in challenging the definition of "art".

ESTABLISHING HIMSELF IN CANADA

When Oscar Cahén arrived in Canada in 1940, he was already an experienced illustrator with a recognizable style: a kind of cross between fashion illustration and caricature, drawn with a calligraphic painted line. He also used a harsh, high-contrast crayon technique for subjects that warranted an element of horror, such as a poster warning soldiers to stay away from prostitutes, and a funny, cute style for spot illustrations.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, poster warning against venereal disease, c. 1944, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Praying Family*, 1948, oil on canvas board, 60 x 51 cm, private collection.

Cahén made a major transition around 1946, when—as in *Praying Family*, 1948—he began painting canvases portraying people suffering, using thick paint and simplified yet exaggerated body proportions and facial expressions, in dull, depressive colours. He also painted Christian imagery using Cubist and Expressionist qualities and more intense, uplifting colours. In 1949 he made his first abstract works, characterized by unusual colour combinations and an energetic synthesis of intersecting and overlapping shapes and lines. These were executed in oils and in pastels.

Oscar Cahén, *Watercolour 131-12*, c. 1956, ink and watercolour with rubber resist, 75.6 x 101.3 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

By 1951 he was working in bright aniline dyes on large sheets of paper or canvas, letting the dyes bleed wet into the highly wetted surface, yielding characteristic soft feathering of edges and lines. In 1951 Cahén increased his production, after receiving attention in national newspapers, in *Canadian Art* magazine, and in the competitive *Art Directors Annual*.[6] From that point on his works show the hot colour and cohesiveness in composition that made him so influential. By 1955 he was using an increasingly gestural line in his abstract painting, reminiscent of his illustration work, and he sometimes returned to a more sombre palette. He also began a large series of watercolours on paper using rubber cement resist and transparent layers of colour. In other works he turned again to figurative subjects.

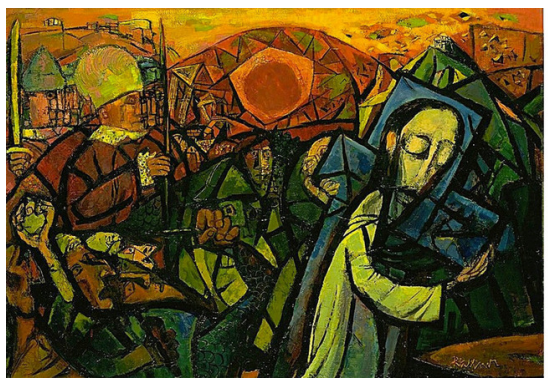
INFLUENCES

The twentieth century saw an explosion of art movements, which would account for the myriad influences that have been read into Oscar Cahén's work. Elements of Gothic art, Cubism, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Bauhaus, English modernism, American modernism, caricature, Czech and German illustration, American illustration, and the influence of his fellow Toronto painters can all be plausibly detected in Cahén's oeuvre. Only a handful of artists, however, are documented as having any connection with Cahén.

Oscar Cahén, illustration for "Don Giovanni," by Herbert Lestocq, *The Standard*, October 3, 1942.

In 1935 Cahén and William Pachner (b. 1915) formed a partnership in Prague, Cahén-Pachner Advertising Designs and Painted Posters.[7] Cahén's illustrations circa 1940 are often dead ringers for Pachner's: young women with jutting chins and cheekbones and a shadow just under the eyes, skirt hems rippling, rendered in calligraphic outlines heightened with wash. Cahén added flat textured patterns and unusual compositional devices (such as hands in the foreground).

Cahén spoke highly of the French poster designer and painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901); the Jewish-American illustrator and anti-Nazi caricaturist Arthur Szyk (1894–1951); David Stone Martin (1913–1992), who designed jazz music record covers with Picassoesque line drawings; and the comic strip artist Milton Caniff (1907–1988).[8] When Cahén began painting religious themes, he looked to Gothic art for inspiration.[9] He also praised *Miserere* by Georges Rouault (1871–1958), a series of etchings relating to the tragedy of war and the question of faith, produced in 1916–17 and 1920–27 but not published until 1948. Cahén's *Christus*, c. 1949–50, shares Rouault's simplified forms delineated in black, like stained glass.



RIGHT: Abraham Rattner, *Procession*, 1944, oil on linen, 65.4 x 92.4 cm, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. LEFT: Oscar Cahén, *The Adoration*, 1949, oil on Masonite, 122 x 133 cm, private collection.

Special note must also be made of American artists Rico Lebrun (1900–1964), whom Cahén called an "artist of stature,"[10] and Abraham Rattner (1895–1978); both artists made major works on biblical themes. It is to Lebrun that Cahén owes the occasional slumped-over figure seen from the front, drawn in heavy, scratchy lines, its body parts distorted with angst. Cahén first saw Rattner's work on a visit to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) with Harold Town (1924–1990), who later recalled that Cahén was hugely impressed.[11] Rattner may have been behind Cahén's 1949 turn to a Cubist design over an entire canvas and to the use of intense colour, as in *The Adoration*, 1949, but this remains speculative.

Much has been made of the impact of British modernists on Toronto artists around 1950; Graham Sutherland's (1903–1980) abstractions of nature using exaggerated thorns have been especially noted.[12] Two postcards of Sutherland images exist in Cahén's estate; Harold Town claimed that Cahén was "fascinated" by him.[13] Cahen's *Vegetation*, 1951, is indeed reminiscent. Sutherland saturated the art of so many Toronto artists that the hook/thorn/crescent became a ubiquitous visual phoneme calling out to those striving to be *au courant*.[14] Cahén also distilled thorny motifs from his analysis of claws and beaks, as in *Untitled* (230), 1950–51, but he was no doubt encouraged to keep with them because they resonated so well with peers and supporters. He was, after all, concerned with communicating, and he looked forward to "turning out pictures which will please both me and the public at large."[15]

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (230), 1950–51, oil on board, 46 x 61 cm, private collection.

MAKING ILLUSTRATIONS

In photographs, we see Oscar Cahén working at a drafting table in one studio for his illustration and at an easel in another studio for oil painting and for making exploratory sketches. Water-based media would have been executed on a flat surface.

Oscar and Mimi at the drafting table in Montreal, c. 1943, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

In fiction and non-fiction illustration, the art director discusses with the illustrator what might be depicted and what style would be suitable. Usually the illustrator submits a rough drawing or a detailed comprehensive sketch for approval before executing a polished final. However, Cahén said:

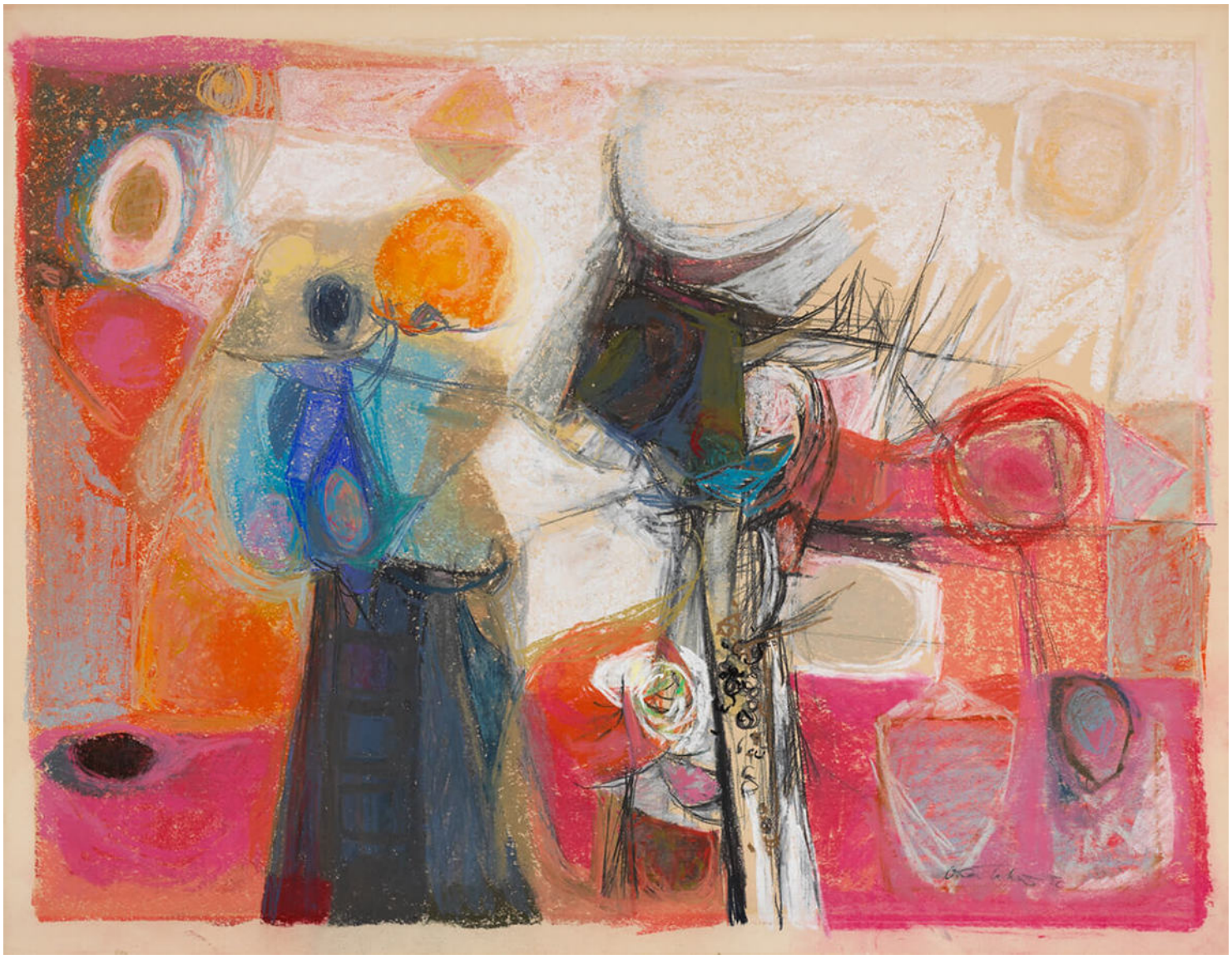
> In my illustrations I rarely make such preliminary drawings. In fact, much to the dismay of art directors, my "roughs" are usually so sketchy that I can't make them out myself. What I do is to start my finished drawing with a hard pencil right on the board, then I ink in the final design and erase the pencil marks which made up the initial draft. Thus, by eliminating first roughs, I feel I am able to retain in the completed illustrations the full quality of the initial enthusiasm. As for media used, I mix my techniques as subject or purpose dictates.[16]

Indeed, Cahén used ink, graphite, pastel, casein, scratchboard, watercolour, wax, dyes, and oils—often several together. He also employed "Bourges sheets"—transparent plastic overlays in process colours (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) that made it easy and inexpensive to do multi-hued illustrations without the cost that colour-separating full-colour paintings would entail.

Oscar Cahén, illustration for "When Johnny Lifted the Horn," *Weekend Picture Magazine*, December 29, 1951, gouache, watercolour, India ink, graphite on illustration board, 58.4 x 52.4 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

MAKING FINE ART

In contrast to his illustration work, Cahén made sketches before embarking on a painting. He usually stuck to traditional media, such as oil on canvas or Masonite and watercolour, pastel, or ink on paper, though he sometimes painted with aniline dyes. Aniline dye is made from petroleum by-products and came in hues far more vibrant than any other art material of Cahén's day—even neon pink. Unfortunately, many of these dyes have faded in his works.



Oscar Cahén, *Still-life*, 1950, pastel on illustration board, 71 x 91.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Although he may have begun with sketches, Cahén built up his oil paintings in several passes on different days; he even went back into canvases he had formerly considered finished and had already signed—as we can tell by comparing the finished state of *Untitled* (221), 1953, with how it appears in period photographs of the interior of Cahén's home.

Cahén apparently made few lithographs. He did, however, often ink up a stone, place paper on it lightly, and then rub it and draw on it with a sharp object. When the paper was lifted off, it picked up the ink and the stone's pleasingly soft, dappled texture. The scored lines came out black. Drawing on the paper with the pointed tool left no visible mark, meaning Cahén could not be exactly sure what he was doing. This exercise would have countered the slick facility that he was ever-wary of slipping into.

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (427), c. 1952, reverse drawing from lithography stone, ink, and pastel, 71.1 x 50.8 cm, private collection.

Cahén experimented with ceramics, probably with Blue Mountain Pottery founders Jozo Weider (1907–1971) and Denis Tupy (b. 1929).[17] He glazed a small number of plates with abstract designs and, according to his son, also designed a set of dishes with a blue fish pattern, now lost. Cahén also enjoyed woodcarving; his small figures emote the same keening passions of his paintings circa 1947.

LEFT: Oscar Cahén, plate, c. 1950–56, glazed terracotta, approx. 20 x 20 x 0.9 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Untitled* (1141), c. 1947–50, wood, approx. 15 x 17 x 12 cm, The Cahén Archives, Toronto.

TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS

Cahén did most of his technical innovation in illustration before taking it into his self-directed painting. A 1943 spot illustration of two roosters, rendered with a touch of analytic Cubism, anticipates the highly Expressionist *Cockfight* of 1951. Cahén also first used collage in his commercial work, papering the background of a domestic scene with newspaper in one picture, sticking a real postage stamp onto a letter in another.

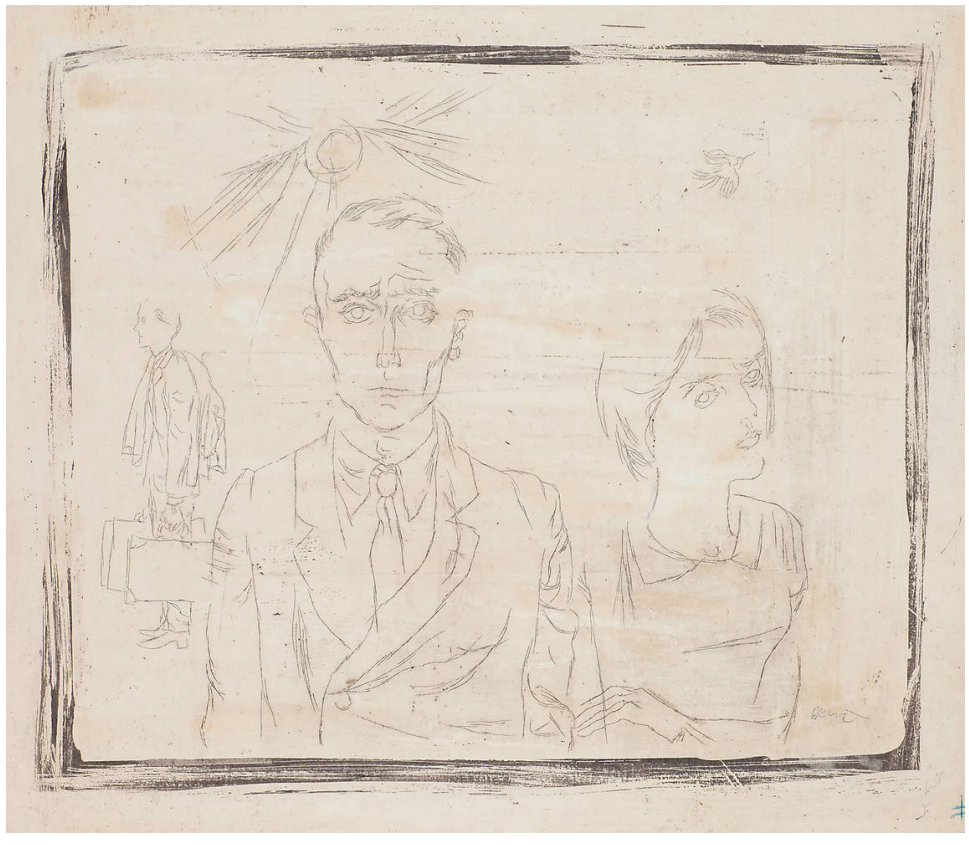
LEFT: Oscar Cahén, illustration for "The Runner," by Kerry Wood, *The Standard*, March 27, 1943, tearsheet, The Cahén Archives, Toronto. RIGHT: Oscar Cahén, *Cockfight*, 1951, ink on paper, 50.8 x 66 cm, private collection.

One of his most noticeably different illustration styles was used for "The Californian's Tale," exaggerating the figures' bony limbs and giving them oversized feet and hands, practically sculpting them in heavily applied paint contained by rugged black outlines recalling Gothic art and Expressionism.

Perhaps Cahen's most original contribution was a technique he called "monoetching," which he began using around 1950 for both figurative and abstract works. The result was not actually an etching—a print made from a metal plate with the image eaten into it with acid—but it looked like one. The monoetching was in fact a thin layer of wax on illustration board that Cahén then scratched through with a needle. Water-based pigment applied overtop seeped through the scratches into the exposed board beneath.

Oscar Cahén, illustration for "The Pirate," by John Steinbeck, *The Standard*, February 14, 1948, ink and casein on illustration board, 30.5 x 50.8 cm, private collection.

Monoetching carried with it an element of uncertainty because, until the final pigment wash was applied, it was almost impossible to see whether the wax had covered all areas, or whether the scratches had gone too deep or too shallow. Indeed, it would have been difficult for Cahén to even see what he was drawing. This may account for the spidery hand and missing lines of the woman's shoulder and head in *We Don't Understand Our DPs*, 1951. But the awkwardness of the draftsmanship in wax gave emotional meaning to these wraithlike, alienated refugees. In a depiction of the *Crucifixion*, c. 1950, Cahén used the monoetching to advantage when he literally gouged out the illustration board and filled it with red paint to represent the wound in Christ's side.



Oscar Cahén, illustration for "We Don't Understand Our DPs," *The Standard*, 1951, encaustic with watercolour wash, 33 x 41 cm, private collection.

Cahén continued exploiting water-resist approaches with rubber cement after 1953. Taking advantage of the medium's fluidity, he drooled and drizzled abstract forms onto paper, then painted over them with thin watercolours and inks, layer after transparent layer. Again, he would not have been able to see exactly how the image was turning out until he removed the rubber cement. The element of surprise preserved spontaneity and again provided Cahén with a way of disrupting his facility at painting and drawing, allowing him to break through to new visual languages.

Probably more than any other of his talents, Cahén is best remembered today for his luminous colour sense. Orange and pink come together often; fiery reds and limpid blues and greens characterize some of his best-known works. At Cahén's 1954 solo show at Hart House in Toronto, critic Hugh Thomson said, "As soon as you enter, the colors and startling designs come out at you from the wall."[18] Another described his colour as a "battering ram."[19]

Oscar Cahén, *Austin Healey 100 Engine*, 1954, oil on cradled Masonite, 91 x 122 cm, private collection.

Oscar Cahén was unusual in his ability to move from one medium to another and from representational to abstract idioms with equal success. For instance, he often illustrated beloved automobiles with elegant curves, staying true to their make and model–but when painting his own Austin-Healey, he began sketching in pencil the fan, pistons, and other elements of its engine that, by the time he moved to oils, became an exuberantly coloured concatenation of forms synesthetically conveying sound. Although he was quick to absorb myriad sources and could initially seem derivative when embarking on a new path, he rapidly amalgamated each influence into expressions of his own and became innovative. As a result, his work never became stale, and he was often a trendsetter. As critic Robert Fulford surmised, "If any one man can be given credit for the vitality of Toronto art in the 1950s, the man is Oscar Cahén."[20]

WHERE TO SEE

Oscar Cahén's paintings are featured in museums and galleries throughout Canada. Other paintings, illustrations, prints, ceramics, and personal papers are held by The Cahén Archives. Although the works listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.

ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA

1040 Moss Street
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
250-384-4171
aggv.ca

Oscar Cahén, *Structure with Blue*, 1951
Pastel and charcoal on paper
87.7 x 63.6 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Structure with Pink Line*, 1954
Watercolour on paper
50.7 x 66.3 cm

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-225-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net

Oscar Cahén, *Herod No. 2*, 1949
Crayon on paperboard
57.5 x 44.5 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Bouquet*, 1952
Watercolour on paper
65.7 x 50.8 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Trophy*, 1955–56
Oil on Masonite
121.6 x 83.1 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, 1956
Watercolour with rubber resist on paper
72.7 x 46.1 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, 1956
Oil on Masonite
58.4 x 84.2 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Watercolour 131-12*, c. 1956
Ink and watercolour with rubber resist
75.6 x 101.3 cm

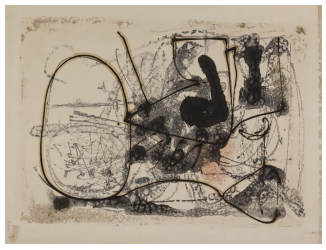
ART GALLERY OF WINDSOR

401 Riverside Drive West
Windsor, Ontario, Canada
519-977-0013
agw.ca

Oscar Cahén, *Little Structure*, n.d.
Oil and ink on canvas
40 x 69 cm

BRITISH MUSEUM

Great Russell Street
London, United Kingdom
+44 20 7323 8299
britishmuseum.org



Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, 1954
Monotype
46.4 x 64 cm

CONTEMPORARY CALGARY – C2 AT CITY HALL

104-800 Macleod Trail, SE
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
403-262-1737
contemporarycalgary.com

Oscar Cahén, *A Hero Comes Home*, 1952
India ink, watercolour on high-art illustration board
63.5 x 43.1 cm

JUDITH & NORMAN ALIX ART GALLERY

147 Lochiel Street
Sarnia, Ontario, Canada
519-336-8127
jnaag.ca

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, 1956
Gouache and watercolour on board
68.6 x 87.3 cm

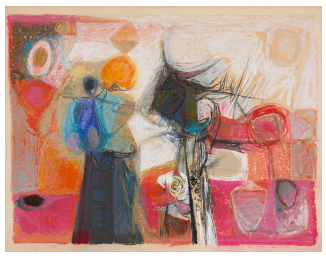
MUSEUM LONDON

421 Ridout Street
North London, Ontario, Canada
519-661-0333
museumlondon.ca

Oscar Cahén, *Animal Structure*, 1953
Oil on Masonite
122 x 91.4 cm

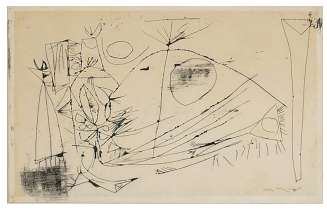
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985
gallery.ca



Oscar Cahén, *Still-life*, 1950
Pastel on illustration board
71 x 91.3 cm

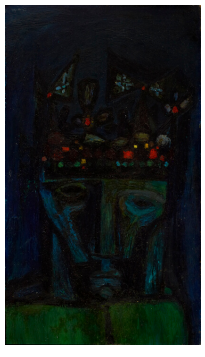
Oscar Cahén, *Animated Item*, c. 1955
Oil on canvas
71.5 x 87 cm



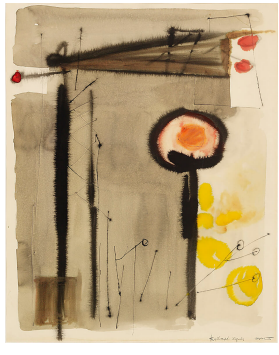
Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, 1956
Pen and black ink with yellow watercolour on illustration board
25.5 x 40.5 cm

ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN GALLERY

72 Queen Street
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
905-576-3000
rmg.on.ca



Oscar Cahén, *Herod*, c. 1950
Oil on canvas
60.9 x 35.6 cm



Oscar Cahén, *Railroad Signs*, 1952
Watercolour, ink on paper
59.9 x 47.5 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Ascend*, 1952
Watercolour, pastel, and charcoal on illustration board
97.5 x 75.9 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Small Structure*, 1955
Oil on canvas
40.6 x 50.1 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Black Trophy*, 1956
Oil on Masonite
122 x 91.2 cm

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

750 Hornby Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
604-662-4700
vanartgallery.bc.ca

Oscar Cahén, *Untitled*, n.d.
Conté on cardboard
97.4 x 71.5 cm

Oscar Cahén, *Child, Father and Mother*, c. 1952–54
Monotype
49.2 x 60.6 cm

THE CAHÉN ARCHIVES

Toronto, Ontario, Canada
250-247-8742

Viewings by appointment
Researcher access to database at oscarcahen.com

Email: archives@cahen.net

NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. Archives of the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Dresden.

2. MI5, National Archives, Kew, England, file: Cahen, Ferdinand Max [*sic*], April 24, 1916–March 29, 1946.

3. Fritz Max Cahén, Bobbs-Merrill Questionnaire (1939), Lilly Library, Bobbs-Merrill papers; Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 103–6, 126; Fritz Max Cahén, "The Alfred Richard Meyer Circle," in *The Era of German Expressionism*, ed. Paul Raabe (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 103–18.

4. Fritz Max Cahén, *Der Weg nach Versailles: Erinnerungen, 1912–1919* (Boppard/Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1963); Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 22–23; MI5, National Archives, Kew, England, file: Cahen, Ferdinand Max [*sic*], April 24, 1916–March 29, 1946.

5. Oscar Cahén, questionnaire, Library of the National Gallery of Canada; McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23; Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 64–65, 95.

6. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 67, 74, 163; Ursula Langkau-Alex, "Der Parteivorstand der SPD im Exile: Protokolle der Sopade 1933–1940," *International Review of Social History* 41, no. 2 (August 1996): 248–51; Karel Pale?ek, interrogation record (November 27–28, 1949), Security Services Archives, files of Second Department of Military Intelligence, Prague; Czech National Archives, Presidium of the General Land Office, Prague.

7. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 100, 102.

8. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 125.

9. Ole Haslund's Hus, Ostergade, Copenhagen, November 1934. In an interview Cahén says he had already exhibited in Prague as well. "Forfalsket Sin Daabsattest," unidentified Danish newspaper, November 14, 1934; "Ung Tysk Tegner," unidentified newspaper; "Ustilling Hos Ole Haslund," unidentified newspaper, The Cahén Archives.

10. MI5, National Archives, Kew, England, file: Cahen, Ferdinand Max [*sic*]; Karel Pale?ek, interrogation record (November 27–28, 1949), Security Services Archives, files of Second Department of Military Intelligence, Prague; Czech National Archives, Presidium of the General Land Office, Prague.

11. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 114; interview with William Pachner, September 29, 2014.

12. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

13. William Pachner, interview by Jaleen Grove, September 29, 2013.

14. Czech National Archives, Police Headquarters Prague II, General Registry file: Cahén, Oskar.

15. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 115–25; Karel Pale?ek, interrogation record (November 27–28, 1949), Security Services Archives, files of Second Department of Military Intelligence, Prague; Czech National Archives, Presidium of the General Land Office, Prague.

16. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 224–27; Czech National Archives, Ministry of Interior I, Presidium, Prague.

17. Fritz Max Cahén, *Men Against Hitler* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), 244.

18. Czech National Archives, Police Headquarters Prague II, General Registry file: Rotter, Vilém.

19. Czech National Archives, Police Headquarters Prague II, General Registry file: Cahén, Oskar.

20. Karel Paleček, interrogation record (November 27–28, 1949), Security Services Archives, files of Second Department of Military Intelligence, Prague.

21. Eric Koch, *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980).

22.Oscar Cahén, "Song for a Fading Difference" (manuscript; translation by Gerta Moray), The Cahén Archives.

23. Eric Koch, *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980), 136–44.

24. Eric Koch, *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980), 157.

25. Beatrice Fischer, interview by Jaleen Grove, July 12, 2013; August 12, 2014.

26. Ben Turner, letter to Samuel Goldner, May 2, 1942, archives of the United Jewish Relief Agencies, collection Series BC.

27. *The Standard*, unidentified news clipping, c. June 1942.

28. Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, no. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

29. Colin Gravenor, letter to C.F. Martin, President, Art Association of Montreal, June 4, 1943, The Cahén Archives.

30. Rachel Boisclair, "Les impacts du contexte canadien de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale sur le fonctionnement et les orientations esthétiques de l'Art Association of Montreal" (MA thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, forthcoming).

31. "Three Painters at Art Gallery," *Montreal Star*, November 9, 1943.

32. Gerry Waldston, interview by Jaleen Grove, September 26, 2013.

33. Documentation of Fritz Max Cahén's illness and efforts to bring him to Canada are in letters in the Archives of the Ontario Jewish Association, and Archives of the United Jewish Relief Agencies, collection Series BC.

34. J.E. Duggan, Department of the Secretary of State, Ottawa, letter to Martha Levinsky, January 3, 1941, The Cahén Archives.

35. Everett Roseborough, letter to Michael Cahén, May 31, 2004, The Cahén Archives; "Former City Artist Happy on Secluded Farm," *Globe and Mail*, October 25, 1947, 15.

36. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23. "

37. Documentation of Fritz Max Cahén's illness and efforts to bring him to Canada are in letters in the Archives of the Ontario Jewish Association, and Archives of the United Jewish Relief Agencies, collection Series BC.

38. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

39. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

40. *The New York Art Directors Club, 1951–1952* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952), 287.

41. Cahén in Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1950): 2–8.

42. Jim Imlach, letter to Harold Town, August 23, 1948, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada. Imlach reiterated this in another letter, October 16, 1948.

43. Harold Town, untitled manuscript in three drafts, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

44. Harold Town, untitled manuscript in three drafts, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

45. Jeffrey Spalding, "Chronological List of Exhibitions," unpublished manuscript, The Cahén Archives. n.d.

46. "Pictures Are My Business" (advertisement), *Globe and Mail*, October 28, 1953, 7.

47. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

48. Beatrice Fischer, interview by Jaleen Grove, July 12, 2013; August 12, 2014.

49. The statement and the images were made in connection with McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951 (photographs by Page Toles), The Cahén Foundation.

KEY WORKS: UNTITLED (PIANO PLAYER)

1. Gerry Waldston, interview with Jaleen Grove, August 2013.

2. "Commercial Art Shown in Gallery," *Montreal Standard*, November 6, 1943; "Three Painters at Art Gallery," *Montreal Star*, November 9, 1943. Co-exhibitors were Sam Borenstein and Emme Frankenberg.

3. "Three One Man Shows," *Montreal Gazette*, November 6, 1943.

4. "Commercial Art Shown in Gallery," *Montreal Standard*, November 6, 1943.

5. "A Night Out in Montreal," *Weekend* 6, no. 52 (December 28, 1956): 28–29.

KEY WORKS: HIROSHIMA COVER ILLUSTRATION

1. McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paintbrush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

2. Oscar Cahén, cited in McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paintbrush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

KEY WORKS: ILLUSTRATION FOR "THE CALIFORNIAN'S TALE"

1. Oscar Cahén, in Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1950): 3–4.

2. H.G. of Beaton, BC, "Vox Pop," *New Liberty*, July 1948, 3. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

3. Toronto Art Directors Club, *Annual* (Toronto: Art Directors Club, 1949).

4. James Imlach, letter to Harold Town, OctoberÂ 16, 1948, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

KEY WORKS: THE ADORATION

1. Oscar Cahén quoted in a letter from W.R., "Memo to Our Readers," *New Liberty*, 1948.

2. Stan Furnival, speech, Art Gallery of Toronto, March 25, 1959. Transcript in The Cahén Archives.

3. Oscar Cahén, quoted in David Mawr, "Modern Art a Reality," *Windsor Daily Star*, August 29, 1953.

4. This reading was proposed by Cy Strom at the Second Oscar Cahén Colloquium, held at The Cahén Archives, Toronto, April 26, 2014.

KEY WORKS: MACLEAN'S COVER ILLUSTRATION

1. This reading was proposed by Cy Strom at the Second Oscar Cahén Colloquium, held at The Cahén Archives, Toronto, April 26, 2014.

2. Rose MacDonald, "Is Art Revolution Here or Is It Doodling Phase?" *Toronto Telegram*, March 9, 1951, 3.

KEY WORKS: GROWING FORM

1. Minutes of the Hart House Art Committee Meeting #213, January 5, 1954; #214, February 2, 1954.

2. Hugh Thomson, "Hart House Gallery Shows Abstract Art," *Toronto Daily Star*, October 28, 1954, 4.

3. Harold Town, quoted in Karen Finlay, "Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955," *Canadian Art Review* 21, nos. 1–2 (1994): 43–59; David Burnett, *Oscar Cahén* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 16.

KEY WORKS: SMALL COMBO

1. Rose McDonald, "At the Galleries," *Toronto Telegram*, February 14, 1954. Clipping in The Cahén Archives.

2. Charles Benbow, "Ringling Offers Feast for Eyes," *St. Petersburg Times*, October 6, 1968, G1. Clipping in The Cahén Archives.

3. Tom Hodgson, interview by Joan Murray, January 27, 1979. Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

4.Ninth sale of the Women's Committee, Art Gallery of Toronto, October 21-31, 1955.

KEY WORKS: WARRIOR

1.*The 2nd Winnipeg Show*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, November 4–25, 1956.

KEY WORKS: MULTI-PART MURAL FOR IMPERIAL OIL EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING

1. Lela Wilson, "The Imperial Oil Mural," http://staging.yorkwilsonfoundation.org/biography/YW_LifeandWork_Chapter11.pdf

2. Contract between Imperial Oil Ltd. and Oscar Cahén, May 5, 1955. Collection of the Glenbow Museum. Salary of a male working in manufacturing is based on Statistics Canada data.

3. Robert Fulford, "The Case of the Missing Art Books," *Mayfair*, September 1957, 63.

4. Harold Town, "Note to Critics: Light Bulbs Have No Lesson for the Sun," *Globe and Mail*, November 25, 1972, 31.

KEY WORKS: UNTITLED (384)

1. Oscar Cahén, quoted in David Mawr, "Modern Art a Reality," *Windsor Daily Star*, August 29, 1955.

2. Norman McLaren's *Pen Point Percussion* (1951) screened October 16, 1952; Begone Dull Care (1949) screened October 30, 1952; *Boogie Doodle* (1941) screened November 20, 1952. Minutes of Hart House Art Committee Meeting, #207, February 12, 1953. *Abstraction in Canadian Art* ran October 27–November 24, 1952.

3. Art Directors Club Annual, 1957.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Oscar Cahén, quoted in Elizabeth Kilbourn, *Great Canadian Painting* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), 104.

2. Harold Town, *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1959).

3. Oscar Cahén, "Editorial Art in Canada in 1953," *6th Annual of Editorial and Advertising Art* (Toronto Art Directors Club, 1954), 54–55.

4. Mrs. G.H. Snider, "Doodling Surrealist?" in "Vox Pop," *New Liberty*, February 14, 1948, 57.

5.Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972), 138. See also Cy Strom, "A Crown of Thorns: Religious Iconography in the Art of Oscar Cahén," paper given at the Cahén Colloquium II, April 26, 2014.

6. This view is expressed in McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23; and in a letter by Mimi Cahén to J. Russell Harper, December 9, 1963; J. Russell Harper fonds, Library and Archives Canada. A sophisticated analysis of the period's impact on Toronto artists is found in Ihor Holubizky and Robert McKaskell, *1953* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2003). The identification of the German avant-garde with democracy is discussed in Keith Holz, *Modern German Art for Thirties Paris, Prague, and London: Resistance and Acquiescence in a Democratic Public Sphere* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

7. "Dream Dresses," *The Standard*, May 25, 1946, 12.

8. Graham McInnes, *Canadian Art* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1950), 77, 105; Paul Duval, *Canadian Drawings and Prints* (Toronto: Burns & McEachern, 1952), 89. See also Paul Duval, *Canadian Water Colour Painting* (Toronto: Burns & McEachern, 1954).

9. "Publicity in Canada," *Gebrauchsgraphik* 2 (1951): 20; Paul Arthur, "Canada: Advertising and Editorial Art," *Graphis* 10, no. 52 (1954): 100–13, 158; "Montreal Art Directors Club," *Publimondial* 53 (1953), 63; *International Advertising Art*, February 1951; *The New York Art Directors Club, 1951–1952* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952), 287.

10. Carl Dair, "New Patterns in Canadian Advertising," *Canadian Art*, Summer 1952, 157.

11. Elizabeth Kilbourn, *Oscar Cahén: 1916–1956* (Toronto: Jerrold Morris Gallery, 1963). Gerta Moray, *Harold Town: Life and Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2014); Dennis Reid, *Toronto Painting: 1953–1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 13; Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007), 98, 100; Michel DuPuy, "Douze ans de peinture Torontoise," unidentified newspaper, 1972.

12. Don O'Donnell, "Canadian Art's Variety Show," *The Standard*, February 4, 1950, 18–19. Royal Canadian Academy Annual Exhibition, Art Association of Montreal, 1950.

13. Oscar Cahén, letter to Harold Town, May 29, 1950, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada. Cahén sent out work by Harold Town, William Winter, Peter Whalley, and Len Norris.

14. Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.; Cahén in Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 2–8.

15. Paul Arthur, "Canada: Advertising and Editorial Art," *Graphis* 10, no. 52 (1954): 100–13, 158.

16. Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p. For comments on Cahén as an alternative to American style, see Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 4.

17. *The Standard*, unidentified news clipping, c. June 1942.

18. William Pachner, interview by Jaleen Grove, September 29, 2014; Corey Ross, "Visions of Prosperity: The Americanization of Advertising in Interwar Germany," in *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 52–77.

19. Jean Ainsworth, interview by Jaleen Grove, October 9, 2014.

20. Tom McNeely and Gerry Sevier, in conversation with Jaleen Grove, 2013; 2014.

21. Dick Hersey, letter to Harold Town, June 20, 1950, Harold Town fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

22. *Oscar Cahén: Canada's Groundbreaking Illustrator*, curated by Jaleen Grove and Roger Reed, shown at Illustration House, New York (October 5–30, 2011); travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Calgary (2012); and the Whyte Museum, Banff (2013).

23. Paul Duval, foreword to *Painters Eleven 1957* (Toronto: Park Gallery, 1957).

24. Jack Bush to J. Russell Harper, personal correspondence, June 2, 1964, J. Russell Harper fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

25. Ray Mead, quoted in Ronald Weibs and Judith Sandford, "Ray Mead Today," in *Work Seen: Artists' Forum* 9, Summer 1991, 4; Cahén's role is also remarked upon in Jeffrey Spalding, "Oscar Cahén, Painter Extraordinaire–Oscar, Celebrated Illustrator," *Today's Inspiration*, October 31, 2012, http://todaysinspiration.blogspot.ca/2012/10/oscar-cahen-painter-extraordinaire.html.

26. Jock Macdonald, letter to William Ronald, July 16, 1956, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

27. Elizabeth Kilbourn, *Oscar Cahén* (Toronto: Jerrold Morris Gallery, 1963).

28. Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

29. David Burnett, *Town* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 38; Robert Fulford, introduction to *Magnificent Decade: Harold Town; 1955–1965*, ed. David P. Silcox (Toronto: Coach House Press and Moore Gallery, 1997), 10; Elizabeth Kilbourn, *Oscar Cahén* (Toronto: Jerrold Morris Gallery, 1963); J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966); Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972), 135; Dennis Reid, *Toronto Painting, 1953–1965* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 13.

30. Tom Hodgson, interview with Joan Murray, May 6, 1977, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada. In other interviews with Joan Murray, Ray Mead (September 4, 1977), Harold Town (July 11, 1977), and Kazuo Nakamura (May 31, 1977), each found elements of leadership in Macdonald.

31. Toni Onley to Mimi Cahén, personal correspondence, December 4, 1956, The Cahén Archives.

32. "Forester, Hart House Present Fine Shows," November 1952, unidentified newspaper clipping, Hart House Art Committee Minutes.

33. Ken Carpenter, "The Evolution of Jack Bush," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 4, no. 2 (1977–78): 127–28.

34. Clare Bice, "Conflicts in Canadian Art," *Canadian Art*, Winter 1959, 33.

35. Christine Boyanowsky, *The 1950s: Works on Paper* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988), 7; David Burnett, *Oscar Cahén* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983), 12; Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972), 140; Robert Fulford, introduction to *Magnificent Decade: Harold Town; 1955–1965*, ed. David P. Silcox (Toronto: Coach House Press and Moore Gallery, 1997), 10; Elizabeth Kilbourn, *Oscar Cahén: 1916–1956* (Toronto: Jerrold Morris Gallery, 1963); Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007), 103; Joan Murray, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect* (Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1979), 9, 11; Kay Woods, quoted in Paul Duval, "Writer Replies to Town's Comments," *Globe and Mail*, November 28, 1972, 7; Joyce Zemans, "Making Painting Real: Abstract and Non-Objective Art in English Canada, c. 1915–1961," in *The Visual Arts in Canada*, ed. Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010), 173–74.

36. David Burnett, *Town* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 38; Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and Their Contemporaries, 1930–1970* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1972), 141.

37. Harold Town, interview by Joan Murray, September 4, 1977, 12, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada; Gerta Moray, *Harold Town: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2014).

38. William Ronald, letter to Jock Macdonald, December 9, 1956, William Ronald fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

39. Ray Mead, interview by Joan Murray, September 4, 1977, 24, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

40. David Burnett, *Oscar Cahén* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983).

41. Dorothy Pfeiffer, "Drawings and Prints," unidentified newspaper clipping, 1960, The Cahén Archives.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Cahén in Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 8.

2. Zuzana Kopcová, "Atelier Rotter (1928–1939)" (bachelor's thesis, Palacký University, Czech Republic, 2007).

3. Ole Haslund's Hus, Ostergade, Copenhagen, November 1934. In an interview Cahén says he had already exhibited in Prague as well. "Forfalsket Sin Daabsattest," unidentified Danish newspaper, November 14, 1934.

4. Otto Demus, "Kunst Lagerausstellung," edited by The Refugee Committee (Camp N, Sherbrooke, Quebec), *Camp Chronicle*, no. 2 (October 2, 1940): 2. Copy in collection of Paula Draper.

5. Tom Hodgson, interview by Joan Murray, May 28, 1979, 8, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

6. Donald W. Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 2–8; McKenzie Porter, "Volcano with a Paint Brush," *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23; Rose MacDonald, "Is Art Revolution Here Or Is It Doodling Phase?" *Toronto Telegram*, March 9, 1951, 3.

7. Czech National Archives, Police Headquarters Prague II, General Registry file: Cahén, Oskar.

8. Oscar Cahén quoted in Donald W. Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 2–8; Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

9. Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

10. Oscar Cahén quoted in Donald W. Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 2–8.

11. Harold Town, interview by Joan Murray, July 11, 1977, 5, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

12. Karen Finlay, "Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955," *Canadian Art Review* 21, nos. 1–2 (1994): 43–59.

13. Harold Town, interview by Joan Murray, July 11, 1977, 5, Joan Murray fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

14. Gary Michael Dault, "Oscar Cahén: In Search of Lost Fame," *Border Crossings*, August 2004, 58–63.

15. Oscar Cahén, quoted in "'Painters Eleven' Member Enjoys Trafalgar's Charm," *Oakville Record–Star*, 1955, 2C.

16. Cahén in Donald Buchanan, "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind," *Canadian Art*, Autumn 1950, 2–8; Stan Furnival, "Notes on Oscar Cahén," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

17. Weider appears in Cahén's address book; his red clay plates are similar.

18. Hugh Thomson, "Hart House Gallery Shows Abstract Art," *Toronto Daily Star*, October 28, 1954, 4.

19. Rose MacDonald, "At the Galleries," *Toronto Telegram*, February 14, 1954.

20. Robert Fulford, "Tribute to Cahén," *Toronto Daily Star*, April 4, 1959, 22.

GLOSSARY

Abstract Expressionism
A style that flourished in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, defined by its combination of formal abstraction and self-conscious expression. The term describes a wide variety of work; among the most famous Abstract Expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning.

aniline dyes
Used to colour wood, fabric, and leather, aniline dyes are synthetic organic compounds known for their clarity of colour and for retaining the appearance of natural textures.

automatism
A physiological term first applied to art by the Surrealists to refer to processes such as free association and spontaneous, intuitive writing, drawing, and painting that allow access to the subconscious without the interference of planning or controlled thought.

Bauhaus
Open from 1919 to 1933 in Germany, the Bauhaus revolutionized twentieth-century visual arts education by integrating the fine arts, crafts, industrial design, and architecture. Teachers included Josef Albers, Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and László Moholy-Nagy.

Blue Mountain Pottery
Founded in 1953 by Denis Tupy and Jozo Weider and closed in 2004, Blue Mountain Pottery was based in Collingwood, Ontario. The pottery is recognizable by Blue Mountain's signature glazing technique called "reflowing decorating," in which light and dark glazes are applied simultaneously to produce a distinctive streaked effect.

Breuer, Marcel (Hungarian/American, 1902–1981)
An influential modernist designer and architect associated with the Bauhaus, Breuer designed sculptural furniture with lightweight metal or wood. In 1926 he created the iconic Wassily chair (named after Wassily Kandinsky). After emigrating to the United States in 1937, Breuer focused on architecture, though he continued to design furniture.

Bush, Jack (Canadian, 1909–1977)
A member of Painters Eleven, formed in 1953, Bush found his real voice only after critic Clement Greenberg visited his studio in 1957 and focused on his watercolours. Out of these Bush developed the shapes and broad colour planes that would come to characterize a personal colour-field style, parallel to the work of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. With them, Bush participated in Greenberg's 1964 exhibition *Post Painterly Abstraction*.

Caniff, Milton (American, 1907–1988)
A prolific twentieth-century cartoonist and founder of the National Cartoonists Society. Caniff's nationally syndicated comic strip *Dickie Dare*, produced for the Associated Press, led to a position at the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Daily News*, where he developed the popular strip *Terry and the Pirates*.

casein
A milk phosphoprotein, casein is strongly adhesive and commonly employed as glue or as a binding ingredient in paint. Casein paint is used as an alternative to tempera.

Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)
A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including portraits of his wife, still lifes, and Provençal landscapes.

Chagall, Marc (Russian/French, 1887–1985)
A painter and graphic artist, Chagall's work is characterized by colourful, dreamlike images and a defiance of the rules of pictorial logic. Although he employed elements of Cubism, Fauvism, and Symbolism, Chagall did not formally align with any avant-garde movement.

Cubism
A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

Dair, Carl (Canadian, 1912–1967)
A distinguished Canadian designer, Carl Dair was also an internationally recognized typographer, teacher, and writer. He believed in typography as a significant feature of communication and designed Cartier, the first Canadian typeface. His influential book, *Design with Type*, was published in 1952.

Dix, Otto (German, 1891–1969)
An Expressionist painter and printmaker who created harshly satirical, sometimes grotesque depictions of figures from Weimar Germany, Dix was a pioneer of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement. War, prostitution, and human depravity were central themes of his work.

Expressionism
An intense, emotional style of art that values the representation of the artist's subjective inner feelings and ideas. German Expressionism started in the early twentieth century in Germany and Austria. In painting, Expressionism is associated with an intense, jarring use of colour and brush strokes that are not naturalistic.

Franck, Albert (Dutch/Canadian, 1899–1973)
Born in the Netherlands, Franck immigrated to Canada following the First World War. He is known for his watercolours and oil paintings of Toronto streets and houses. Franck was an important influence on Painters Eleven.

Frey, Max (German, 1874–1944)
A painter, illustrator, and graphic designer, Frey painted portraits and landscapes influenced by Symbolism. He was a member of the Dresden Art Cooperative and taught at the Dresden Academy of Arts and Crafts.

Furnival, Stan (Canadian, 1913–1980)
A graphic artist, Furnival served as art director of *Chatelaine* magazine in 1952–53. During his tenure at the magazine, he frequently commissioned illustrator Oscar Cahén and is seen to have been an early supporter of Cahén's career.

German Expressionism
A modernist movement in painting, sculpture, theatre, literature, and cinema. Expressionism's birth is often traced to 1905, when Die Brücke (The Bridge), a group of Dresden painters, broke with the practices and institutions of the academy and bourgeois culture, declaring themselves a "bridge" to the future. Another bold new group, Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider), formed in 1911, focused more on the spiritual in art. Significant Expressionist painters include Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Egon Schiele.

Gordon, Hortense (Canadian, 1889–1961)
A founding member of Painters Eleven, Gordon was known for her bold abstract paintings. She taught at Hamilton Technical School and was appointed principal in 1934.

Gothic art
A style of painting, sculpture, and architecture that emerged in the twelfth century in Europe. A Christian art form, it was primarily expressed through illuminated manuscripts and architecture that featured sculpture and stained glass and valued light and soaring spaces.

Gottlieb, Adolph (American, 1903–1974)
Gottlieb's early representational work evolved toward the surreal and Abstract Expressionism, by which he sought to remove from cultural associations from his work in order to convey a universal language of expression. He was the first American to win the Grand Prize at the Bienal de São Paolo (1963).

Greenberg, Clement (American, 1909–1994)
A highly influential art critic and essayist known primarily for his formalist approach and his contentious concept of modernism, which he first outlined in his 1961 article "Modernist Painting." Greenberg was, notably, an early champion of Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock and the sculptor David Smith.

Grosz, George (German/American, 1893–1959)
A caricaturist and scathing social critic, painter, and draftsman associated with Dada in his early career, Grosz became a pioneer of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity). His avidly anti-war work grew out of his participation in the First World War. His late career focused on landscape and still-life painting, though it retained a bleak tone.

Group of Seven
A progressive and nationalistic school of landscape painting in Canada, active between 1920 (the year of the group's first exhibition, at the Art Gallery of Toronto, now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and 1933. Founding members were the artists Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley.

Heartfield, John (German, 1891–1968)
Born Helmut Franz Josef Herzfeld, John Heartfield was a pioneer of Dada and actively integrated his leftist, pacifist politics with artistic practice. He worked in print design and typography and as an editor for the German Communist Party. With George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, and Hannah Hoch, Heartfield developed photomontage, combining images from mass media to support his political perspective.

Hirschfeld, Al (American, 1903–2003)
Known for his linear calligraphic style, Hirschfeld was a caricaturist whose long and prolific career focused on portraits of celebrities. Hirschfield's work was published widely, from the *New York Times* to *Rolling Stone* to *Playboy* and *TV Guide*.

Hodgson, Tom (Canadian, 1924–2006)
An Abstract Expressionist painter, advertising art director, respected art teacher, and champion athlete raised on Centre Island, in Toronto Harbour. Hodgson was a member of Painters Eleven; he trained with Arthur Lismer at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto, and made action paintings that were often immense in scale.

impasto
Paint applied so thickly that it stands out in relief and retains the marks of the brush or palette knife.

Johnson, Ray (American, 1927–1995)
A collage and performance artist, early practitioner of mail art, and leading light among New York Pop and Conceptual artists. Studied at Black Mountain College under Josef Albers and Lyonel Feininger, formerly of the Bauhaus, as well as Robert Motherwell. Johnson was a feverishly creative artist, for whom the boundary between art and life was all but non-existent.

Kettlewell, Charles William (1914–1988)
"Bill" Kettlewell was an equestrian painter who also worked as an art director in Toronto.

Kline, Franz (American, 1910–1962)
An Abstract Expressionist painter and draftsman whose gestural works drew inspiration from contemporaries such as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning. From the late 1940s Kline's paintings were largely black and white, but in the last years of his career he returned to a full-colour palette.

LaPalme, Robert (Canadian, 1908–1997)
A prolific and influential illustrator and political cartoonist published in almost every French language newspaper in Quebec and an outspoken critic of Premier Maurice Duplessis. LaPalme was also a painter and acted as the artistic director of Expo 67 in Montreal, and of Montreal's metro, where he instituted a program of public art. Three of his own murals are featured in Montreal's metro system.

Lebrun, Rico (Italian/American, 1900–1964)
A commercial artist, painter, sculptor, and muralist. The human form inspired his work. He took as a central theme the human predicament. A popular and influential instructor of art and illustration, his Crucifixion series of abstracted figures is perhaps his best-known work.

Lionni, Leo (Dutch/Italian, 1910–1999)
Influenced by Futurism and the Bauhaus, Lionni was a painter and sculptor who also worked as a commercial artist in advertising and magazine publishing (notably for *Fortune*, *Time-Life*, and *Sports Illustrated*). He began writing and illustrating children's books in 1959.

Luke, Alexandra (Canadian, 1901–1967)
An Abstract Expressionist painter and a member of Painters Eleven, Luke trained at the Banff School of Fine Arts and the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts in Massachusetts. A significant figure in early Canadian abstract art, she was included in the exhibition *Canadian Women Artists* in New York in 1947.

Macdonald, Jock (British/Canadian, 1897–1960)
A painter, printmaker, illustrator, teacher, and a pioneer in the development of abstract art in Canada. Macdonald began as a landscape painter but became interested in abstraction in the 1940s, influenced by Hans Hofmann and Jean Dubuffet. Macdonald was one of the founders of Painters Eleven in 1953. (See *Jock Macdonald: Life & Work* by Joyce Zemans.)

Martin, David Stone (American, 1913–1992)
A prolific and influential graphic designer and illustrator with a kinetic, calligraphic style, Martin was an artist correspondent for *Time-Life* during the Second World War. He is most renowned for having created hundreds of album portraits, especially for jazz musicians such as John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday.

McLaren, Norman (Scottish/Canadian, 1914–1987)
McLaren began his career at General Post Office (GPO) in Scotland before following film producer John Grierson to the National Film Board in Canada. An innovative filmmaker, McLaren created abstract and animated films and experimented with techniques such as drawing directly on celluloid, cutout animation, and superimpositions. He created 72 films over the course of his career.

McNeely, Tom (Canadian, b.1935)
A watercolour painter whose illustrative work was commissioned for television documentaries, print journalism, and books. Notably, McNeely illustrated the endpapers for many books by the popular Canadian historian Pierre Berton.

Mead, Ray (British/Canadian, 1921–1998)
A founding member of Painters Eleven, Mead was an Abstract Expressionist painter whose work, characterized by bold planes of colour, black and white shapes, and sophisticated composition, was inspired by his internal reflections on memories.

modernism
A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Beginning in painting with the Realist movement led by Gustave Courbet, it progressed through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

Motherwell, Robert (American, 1915–1991)
A member of the New York School, a major figure in Abstract Expressionism, and an influential teacher and lecturer, Motherwell employed the automatist technique to create many of his paintings and collages. Over the course of his career, he produced a series called Elegy to the Spanish Republic, 1957–61, inspired by the Spanish civil war.

Nakamura, Kazuo (Canadian, 1926–2002)
A member of Painters Eleven, Nakamura embraced science and nature in his early abstract landscapes. Later, he created a body of work known as the Number Structures, which explores the connections between mathematics and aesthetics. The Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto held a posthumous retrospective of his work in 2004.

Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity)
A movement in German modern art that embraced realist representation as a means of social criticism, often employing brutal satire. Neue Sachlichkeit, or New Objectivity, emerged after the First World War as an artistic response that rejected the avant-garde forms in favour of traditional approaches. Prominent Neue Sachlichkeit artists were Otto Dix, George Grosz, Max Beckmann, George Schrimpf.

Northern Renaissance

Flourishing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Renaissance in Northern Europe was characterized by the rise of Humanism, by an engagement with Italy and the classical world, and by the impact of the Protestant Reformation. Advances in artistic techniques, notably the development of oil paint and printmaking, saw various art forms generated with a high level of invention, detail, and skill. Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Holbein are key figures.

Onley, Toni (British/Canadian, 1928–2004)

A western Canadian artist who painted watercolour landscapes and abstracts, Onley published the book *Onley's Arctic*, based on a trip to the Arctic in 1974. His work is held at the Tate and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, U.K.; the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Pachner, William (American, b.1915)

Having fled Europe for the United States in 1939, Pachner became art director of *Esquire* magazine. Ending his career as a commercial artist, he turned exclusively to painting in response to the Holocaust. His Abstract Expressionist works are defined by swirling, multi-layered colours and texture.

Painters Eleven

An artists' group active from 1953 to 1960, formed by eleven Abstract Expressionist Toronto-area painters, including Harold Town, Jack Bush, and William Ronald. They joined together in an effort to increase their exposure, given the limited interest in abstract art in Ontario at the time.

Parker, Al (American, 1906–1985)

Considered an innovator of illustration at his time, Al Parker was a prominent magazine illustrator from the 1940s to the 1960s. His work appeared in publications such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, *McCalls*, *Vogue*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)

One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1906–7, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

Post-Impressionism

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.

Post-Painterly Abstraction
A style of modernist painting championed by the critic Clement Greenberg, who invented the term as the title for a significant exhibition he curated for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that also toured to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The style favoured the openness and clarity of thinly applied planes of colour. Artists associated with the style include Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and the Canadians Jack Bush and Kenneth Lochhead.

process colours
The transparent ink colours cyan, magenta, yellow and black used to reproduce full-colour photographs or artworks in offset lithographic printing.

Rattner, Abraham (American, 1895–1978)
An Expressionist who painted in a Cubist style, Rattner spent two decades in Europe before returning to America in 1939. On a road trip, writer Henry Miller and Rattner documented American life and subsequently published the account as *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945). In his later career, Rattner designed stained glass that incorporated religious symbolism and references to the Holocaust and nuclear war.

Rockwell, Norman (American, 1894–1978)
A prolific illustrator and painter, Rockwell produced sentimental images of everyday American life. A long-time illustrator for the *Saturday Evening Post*, Rockwell was a popular artist who was critically dismissed during his lifetime. He remains among the most well-known American artists of his era.

Ronald, William (Canadian, 1926–1998)
An Abstract Expressionist and member of Painters Eleven, which sprang from the Toronto group exhibition that he organized in 1953, *Abstracts at Home*. Ronald lived in New York from 1955 to 1965. His work is held both by New York institutions–including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Guggenheim Museum, and Museum of Modern Art–and by numerous Canadian museums.

Rotter, Vilém (Czech, 1903–1960)
An influential graphic artist, Rotter established Rotter Studio, which became the most influential design studio in Prague. Rotter's design incorporated features of modern movements: Art Deco, Expressionism, and abstraction.

Rouault, Georges (French, 1871–1958)
Known for his highly personal and expressive style, Rouault first gained notoriety in the early 1900s with his compassionate renderings of prostitutes and other marginalized people. Informed by Christian spiritualism, his work was finally embraced by the church shortly before his death.

rubber cement resist
A technique in watercolour painting in which rubber cement is applied to a surface that is subsequently painted over with watercolour paints. When the paint is dry, the rubber cement is removed, revealing areas untouched by the paint.

scratchboard
Term refers to the medium and an illustration technique. Scratchboard is a white clay surface coated in black ink. An image is created by using sharp blades and scraping implements to scratch patterns in the clay, revealing the white underneath the surface.

Sevier, Gerry (Canadian, b. 1934)
A commercial artist, illustrator, and instructor, Gerry Sevier uses light and shadow in his work to powerful effect. He is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy and has works in more than 150 corporate collections.

Surrealism
An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris. Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Sutherland, Graham (British, 1903–1980)
A painter, printmaker, and designer interested primarily in landscapes and natural motifs, which he represented in a non-traditional, almost Surrealist style. His Crucifixion and Thorn Head images gained wide currency as expressions of the human condition in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Synesthesia
A neurological condition in which sensory input, such as vision, is simultaneously experienced through one or more additional sense. Synesthesia also occurs when cognition of an abstract concept, such as letters or numbers, triggers a sensory perception, such as of hearing or taste.

Szyk, Arthur (Polish/American, 1894–1951)
An illustrator and cartoonist who championed human rights and civil liberties through artistic media. During the Second World War, Szyk's caricatures, which appeared in newspapers across the United States, effectively highlighted the Jewish plight in Europe. His work was also featured in such publications as the *New York Post*, *Time* magazine, and *Collier's*.

Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de (French, 1864–1901)
A painter and printmaker best known for his depictions of Parisian nightlife, who created a vast body of work despite physical and psychological hardships. Toulouse-Lautrec was celebrated by both the avant-garde and the general public, and the distinctive aesthetic of his turn-of-the-century posters influenced commercial art well into the twentieth century.

Town, Harold (Canadian, 1924–1990)
Town was a founding member of Painters Eleven and a leader in Toronto's art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. An internationally recognized abstract artist, he created paintings, collages, sculptures, and prints with brilliant effect and developed a unique form of monotype, "single autographic prints." (See *Harold Town: Life & Work* by Gerta Moray.)

Trier, Walter (Czech/British/Canadian, 1890–1951)
A Jewish resident of Prague in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Trier relocated to Berlin, then to England in 1936, and later to Canada. He produced anti-Nazi caricatures and, as a commercial artist, he illustrated for *Lilliput* magazine and drew many covers for *The New Yorker*. He was also a book illustrator and designer.

Tupy, Denis (Czech/Canadian, b. 1929)
An accomplished maker of ceramic moulds, Tupy was cofounder of Blue Mountain Pottery, a Canadian pottery brand collected internationally and renowned for its unique glazing process. In 1960 Tupy formed Canadian Ceramic Craft, which created moulds similar to those used in Blue Mountain Pottery.

underpainting
A term that refers to the first layer of a painting, executed in order to set values that will be carried out through the course of painting the work. In general most or all of the underpainting is covered by subsequent layers of paint.

Watson, Sydney H. (Canadian, 1911–1981)
A commercial artist, painter, and educator, Watson was a member of the Canadian Group of Painters and an instructor and eventually head of the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto. His work is held by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa; the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinberg, Ontario; and Hart House at the University of Toronto.

Weber, Max (American, 1881–1961)
A Russian-born painter, sculptor, printmaker, and writer, trained as an artist in Paris. Weber's early admiration and adoption of European modernist movements—including Fauvism and Cubism—made him one of the most significant artists of the American avant-garde.

Weider, Jozo (Czech/Canadian, 1907–1971)
This Czech-born Canadian immigrant was, with Denis Tupy, cofounder of Blue Mountain Pottery, a Canadian pottery brand collected internationally and recognized for its unique glazing process.

Wilson, York (Canadian, 1907–1984)
A painter, collagist, and prominent muralist who lived for many years in Mexico. Wilson worked as a commercial illustrator prior to the 1930s, and while he experimented with abstraction for much of his life, he never abandoned his concern for drawing technique, which he worked continually to refine.

woodcut
A relief method of printing that involves carving a design into a block of wood, which is then inked and printed, using either a press or simple hand pressure. This technique was invented in China and spread to the West in the thirteenth century.

Yarwood, Walter (Canadian, 1917–1996)

Originally a painter, Yarwood abandoned the medium for sculpture after the demise of Painters Eleven, of which he was a member. He constructed his works from such materials as cast aluminum, bronze, wood, and found objects. His public commissions can be found in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal.

SOURCES & RESOURCES

The breadth of Oscar Cahén's oeuvre was obscure until his son, Michael Cahén, inherited a collection of drawings and paintings, most of which had lain in storage for over three decades. This new accessibility has brought renewed attention to Cahén's groundbreaking work as an illustrator and abstract painter. Cahén's paintings are featured in many Canadian art books and can be found in museums and galleries throughout Canada. Much more is being discovered as The Cahén Archives furthers the study of Oscar Cahén's life and work.

KEY EXHIBITIONS

Oscar Cahén first exhibited in his late teens but, aside from two known exceptions, ceased showing until 1947 as he concentrated on his illustration career. During the 1950s Cahén exhibited widely. His work has been included in major exhibitions ever since.

Installation view of *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1959. The Cahén Archives.

1934	November 1934, *Oscar Cahén*, Ole Haslund's Hus, Copenhagen.
1943	November 1943, *Works by Mrs. Emme Frankenburg, Sam Borenstein and Oscar Cahén / Exhibition of Sketches, Watercolours and Illustrations by Oscar Cahén*, Art Association of Montreal (now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).
1952	October 1952, *Canadian Abstract Exhibition*, Oshawa YWCA and Hart House, Toronto.
1953	October 1953, *Abstracts at Home,* The Robert Simpson Co., Toronto.
1953–54	December 1953–February 1954, 2nd Bienal de São Paulo.
1954	March 1954, Canadian section at the Tenth Inter-American Conference, Caracas. October–November 1954, *Oscar Cahén*, Hart House, Toronto.

1955	March–April 1955, *Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Jacques de Tonnancour and Paul-Émile Borduas*, Elsie Perrin Williams Memorial Art Gallery, London, Ontario.
1956	April–May 1956, *20th Annual Exhibition of American Abstract Artists with "Painters Eleven" of Canada*, Riverside Museum, New York. June–July 1956, *Canadian Abstract Painting*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
1958–59	September 1958–March 1959, *Painters Eleven*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; toured to Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Edmonton, Kingston, Sackville.
1959	March–April 1959, *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Toronto (Art Gallery of Ontario).
1960	March 1960, *Oscar Cahén, Paintings*. *André Jasmin, Serigraphs*. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
1968	September–November 1968, *Oscar Cahén: First American Retrospective*, Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida.
1972	September–October 1972, *Toronto Painting, 1953–1965*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; toured to Toronto.
1979	October–December 1979, *Painters Eleven in Retrospect*, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa; toured across Canada.
1983–84	December 1983–February 1984, *Oscar Cahén* retrospective, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; toured to St. John's, Windsor, Edmonton, Winnipeg.
1993	March–May 1993, *The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; toured to Quebec City, Regina, Calgary, Hamilton.
2011	October 2011, *Oscar Cahén: Canada's Groundbreaking Illustrator*, Illustration House, New York; toured to Calgary, Banff.

SELECTED WRITINGS BY THE ARTIST

Oscar Cahén wrote poems, short stories, and music, only a few examples of which survive in The Cahén Archives. He also contributed one important essay on the status of illustration:

"Editorial Art in Canada in 1953." Art Directors Club of Toronto Annual. Toronto: Art Directors Club of Toronto, 1954, 54.

SELECTED CRITICAL WRITING

Although very few scholars have accessed Oscar Cahén's papers and oeuvre, many unverified claims have been repeated for years. Factual errors exist in some of the studies on the artist produced before this one, which will also have to be reviewed as new information comes to light. Nevertheless, previous scholarship brings invaluable perspectives to the appreciation of Oscar Cahén.

Burnett, David. *Oscar Cahén*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983.

Dault, Gary Michael. "Oscar Cahén: In Search of Lost Fame." *Border Crossings*, no. 91 (August 2004): 58–63.

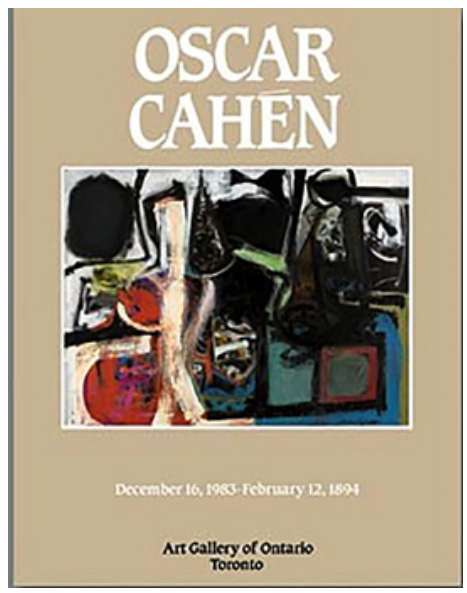
Finlay, Karen. "Identifying with Nature: Graham Sutherland and Canadian Art, 1939–1955." *Canadian Art Review* 21, nos. 1–2 (1994): 43–59.

Grove, Jaleen. "Oscar Cahén: Bringing Things into the Light." In *Oscar Cahén: Canada's Groundbreaking Illustrator*. New York: Illustration House, 2011.

———, ed. Proceedings of the Cahén Colloquium II (2015).

Smart, Tom. Various postings on Oscar Cahén under "Research." *Smart on Art*, September–December 2011. http://www.smartonart.ca/index.cfm/Research.

Spalding, Jeffrey. "Oscar Cahén, Painter Extraordinaire—Oscar, Celebrated Illustrator." *Today's Inspiration*, October 31, 2012. http://todaysinspiration.blogspot.ca/2012/10/oscar-cahen-painter-extraordinaire.html.



Exhibition catalogue for the Art Gallery of Ontario's major retrospective exhibition of Cahén's work, organized by David Burnett in 1983.

KEY INTERVIEWS WITH THE ARTIST

Buchanan, Donald W. "An Illustrator Speaks His Mind." *Canadian Art* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1950): 2–8.

Porter, McKenzie. "Volcano with a Paint Brush." *The Standard*, April 7, 1951, 18–23.

FURTHER READING

The following sources provide excellent background to past and current appreciation of Oscar Cahén.

Arthur, Paul. "Canada: Advertising and Editorial Art." *Graphis Annual* 10, no. 52 (1954): 100–101, 158, 161.

Boyanoski, Christine. *The 1950s: Works on Paper*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988.

Broad, Graham. "Painters Eleven: The Shock of the New." *The Beaver*, February–March 2004, 20–26.

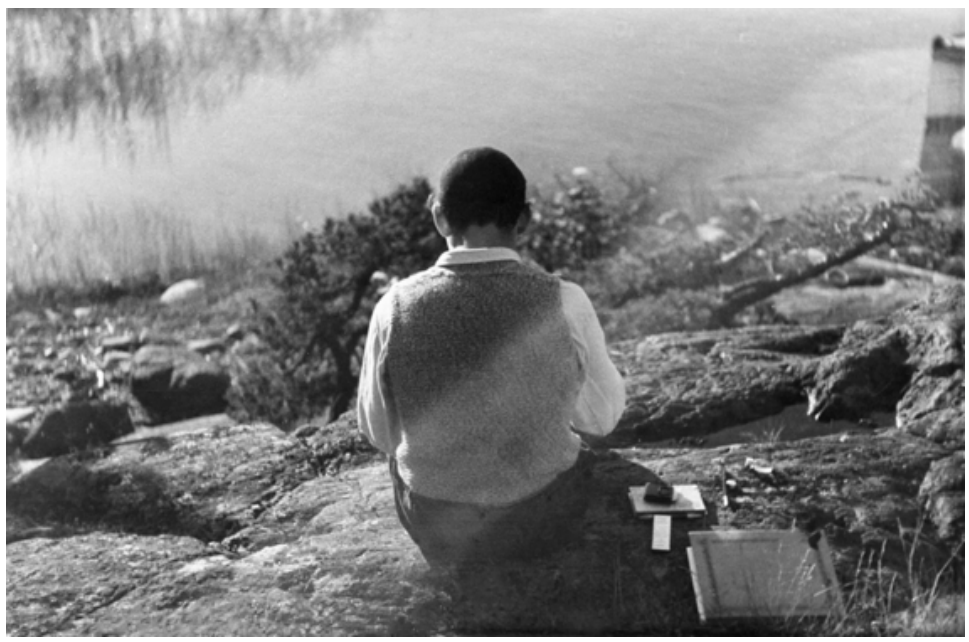
Cahén, Fritz Max. *Men Against Hitler*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939, 22–23.

Dair, Carl. "New Patterns in Canadian Advertising." *Canadian Art* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1952): 152–55.

Furnival, Stan. "Notes on Oscar Cahén." *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of the Northern Arts*, nos. 18/19 (November 1980): n.p.

Hill, James. Presentation of the CAPIC Lifetime Achievement Award to Oscar Cahén (speech), March 26, 1988. In *Oscar Cahén: Canada's Groundbreaking Illustrato*r. New York: Illustration House, 2011.

Koch, Eric. *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder*. Toronto: Methuen, 1980.



Oscar Cahén painting *en plein air*.

Macklem, Katherine. "Bringing Back Oscar." *Maclean's*, October 25, 2004, 59–64.

Murray, Joan. *Painters Eleven in Retrospect*. Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1979.

———. *Origins of Abstraction in Ontario: The Abstracts at Home Show, 1953*. Oshawa: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1992.

Nasgaard, Roald. *Abstract Painting in Canada*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre; Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2007.

Nowell, Iris. *Painters Eleven: The Wild Ones of Canadian Art*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010.

Reid, Dennis. *Toronto Painting: 1953–1965*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1972.

Zemans, Joyce. "Making Painting Real: Abstract and Non-Objective Art in English Canada, c. 1915–1961." In *The Visual Arts in Canada*, edited by Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky, 169–76. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JALEEN GROVE

Jaleen Grove served as the Scholar-in-Residence at the Cahén Archives in Toronto 2013–16. An art historian with a specialization in illustration history, Grove is an associate editor of *History of Illustration* (Bloomsbury, 2018), the first comprehensive book on this topic, as well as associate editor of the *Journal of Illustration*. She has written several monographs, articles, and book chapters on visual culture and on the state of illustration research, and has lectured and delivered papers in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Grove holds a PhD in art history and criticism from SUNY Stony Brook, an MA in communication and culture from Ryerson University, and a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She maintains a studio practice alongside her research and writing, and in 2018 begins a two-year position as assistant professor in illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design.

"Oscar Cahén initially caught my interest because his illustrations were so varied and exciting, and because he moved so easily between illustration and abstract painting. His unusual life and the dearth of reliable information about him led me to dig deep into the archives to find gems. As each forgotten facet of his life comes to light we gain a new way of looking at his art. These discoveries complement recent interest in Painters Eleven, while his illustrations are especially relevant for contemporary graphic novelists."

COPYRIGHT & CREDITS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the Author

Jaleen Grove would like to thank Sara Angel for this opportunity and the staff of ACI for their meticulous work, and to acknowledge the unpublished research of Jeffrey Spalding, Tom Smart, Gerta Moray, Jessica Poon, Cy Strom, Rachel Boisclair, and Paula Draper. She also thanks Michael Cahén, Jim Harrison, and the Visual Literacy Foundation of Canada for use of The Cahén Archives, Alan Flint for input on printmaking, Marek Cerveny for research in Prague, and David Silcox for access to the Harold Town fonds; and she extends gratitude to all interviewees, especially Gerry Waldston, Beatrice Fischer, William Pachner, Jean Ainsworth, and Colin Gravenor, Jr.

From the Art Canada Institute

This online art book was made possible thanks to BMO Financial Group, Lead Sponsor for the Canadian Online Art Book Project. The Art Canada Institute gratefully acknowledges the other sponsors for the 2014–15 Season: Aimia, Consignor Canadian Fine Art, Gluskin Sheff + Associates Inc., the Hal Jackman Foundation, K. James Harrison, The McLean Foundation, Sandra L. Simpson, and TD Bank.

Thanks also to the Art Canada Institute Founding Patrons: Sara and Michael Angel, Jalynn H. Bennett, The Butterfield Family Foundation, David and Vivian Campbell, Albert E. Cummings, Kiki and Ian Delaney, The Fleck Family, Roger and Kevin Garland, The Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, Michelle Koerner and Kevin Doyle, Phil Lind, Sarah and Tom Milroy, Nancy McCain and Bill Morneau, Gerald Sheff and Shanitha Kachan, Sandra L. Simpson, Pam and Mike Stein, and Robin and David Young; as well as its Founding Partner Patrons: The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Partners in Art.

The ACI gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the Art Gallery of Ontario (Jim Shedden and Ebony Jansen); The Cahén Archives; the National Gallery of Canada (Kristin Rothschild, Raven Amiro, and Erika Dola); Museum London (Janette Cousins Ewan); the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Sonya Jones and Linda Jansma); Seth; the Vancouver Art Gallery (Danielle Currie); and private collectors who wish to remain anonymous.

SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IMAGE SOURCES

Every effort has been made to secure permissions for all copyrighted material.
The Art Canada Institute will gladly correct any errors or omissions.

Credit for Cover Image

Oscar Cahén, *Austin Healey 100 Engine*, 1954. (See below for details.)

Credits for Banner Images

Biography: Oscar Cahén painting outdoors in King Township, Ontario, c. 1949. (See below for details.)

Key Works: Oscar Cahén, *The Adoration*, 1949. (See below for details.)

Significance & Critical Issues: Oscar Cahén, *Traumoeba*, 1956. (See below for details.)

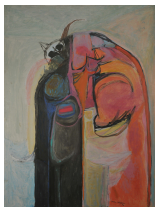
Style & Technique: Oscar Cahén, Illustration for the "The Pirate," 1948. (See below for details.)

Sources & Resources: Oscar Cahén, *Growing Form*, 1953. (See below for details.)

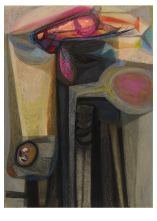
Where to See: Installation view of *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1959. (See below for details).

Credits for Works by Oscar Cahén

The Adoration, 1949. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

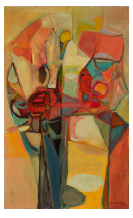


Animal Structure, 1953. Collection of Museum London, Art Fund, 1963, © The Cahén Archives, photography © Museum London.

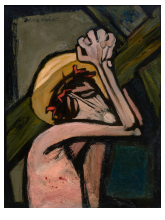


Ascend, 1952. Collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, purchase 1970, © The Cahén Archives.

Austin Healey 100 Engine, 1954. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.



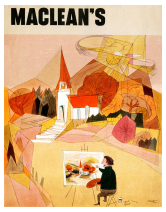
Candy Tree, 1952–53. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.



Christus (322), c. 1949–50. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Cockfight (452), 1951. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Cover illustration for Hiroshima by John Hersey, *The Standard*, 1946, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.



Cover illustration for *Maclean's*, October 15, 1951, printer's proof. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Cover illustration for *Maclean's*, January 15, 1952, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Crucifixion (737), c. 1950. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Ein Gemüt Cartoon, from *Osveny* newspaper, 1934, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Growing Form, 1953. RBC Corporate Art Collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "Babies For Export," *The Standard*, 1947, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "The Californian's Tale," *New Liberty*, 1947. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "Don Giovanni," *The Standard*, 1942, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "The First (and Last) Ottawa Street Café," *Maclean's*, 1955. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "The Most Beautiful Girl I've Ever Known," 1951, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "A Night Out in Montreal," *Weekend*, 1956, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "The Pirate," *The Standard*, 1948. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "The Runner," *The Standard*, 1943, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

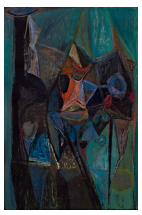
Illustration for "We Don't Understand Our DPs," *The Standard*, 1951. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for "When Johnny Lifted the Horn," *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 1951. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Illustration for short story, "Mail," by John Norman Harris, 1950, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

"Little Jong is Brave as a Tiger," *Weekend Magazine*, 1955, tearsheet. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Magazine Digest cover design, c. 1946, printer's proof. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.



Masque (181), 1950. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Multi-part Mural, Staff Lounge and Cafeteria of the Imperial Oil Executive Office Building, Toronto, 1956, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa. Photographs in collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Object d'Art, c. 1953. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Plate, c. 1950–56. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Poster warning against venereal disease, c. 1944. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

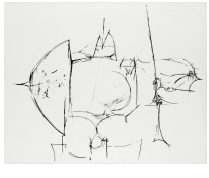
Praying Family, 1948. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Praying Man (170), 1947. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Requiem, c. 1953. Current location unknown, © The Cahén Archives.

Rooster, c. 1950–51, current location unknown. Image taken from 79th Annual Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition Catalogue, 1951.

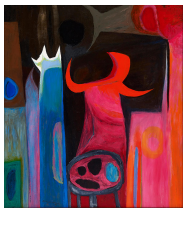
Self-portrait, c. 1930–40. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.



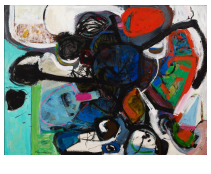
Sketch for Warrior (050), 1955–56. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Small Combo, c. 1954. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Still-life, 1950. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, © The Cahén Archives.



Subjective Image, c. 1954. Collection of Jim and Melinda Harrison, © The Cahén Archives.



Traumoeba, 1956. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (040), c. 1955. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (077), 1953. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (084), 1953. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (128), 1938. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (230), 1950–51. Private collection, © Cahén Archives.

Untitled (368), c. 1955–56. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (384), 1956. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (389), 1946. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (405), c. 1952. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

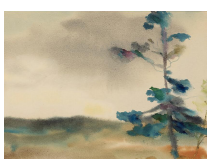
Untitled (427), c. 1952. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (559), 1931. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (1141), c. 1947–50. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (Piano Player), 1943. Private collection, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled (clippings of published work), c. 1943. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.



Untitled, c. 1941. Collection of Beatrice Fischer, © The Cahén Archives.

Untitled, c. 1941. Collection of Beatrice Fischer, © The Cahén Archives.

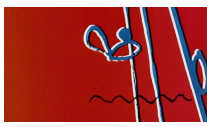
Untitled, 1956. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © The Cahén Archives.

Warrior, 1956. Private collection on loan to National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, © The Cahén Archives.

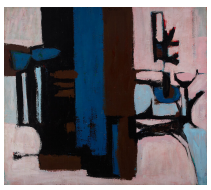
Watercolour 131-12, c. 1956. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © The Cahén Archives.

Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists

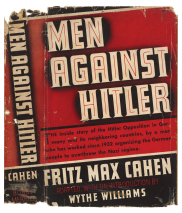
Art Director Gene Aliman and Oscar Cahén at the Art Directors Club annual exhibition, 1955. Collection of The Cahén Archives.



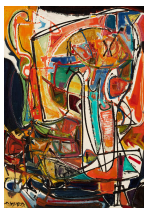
Boogie Doodle, 1941, by Norman McLaren. National Film Board of Canada.



Cathedral, c. 1960, by Walter Yarwood. Collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Gift of Dr. Ralph and Patricia Price, 1984. © Yarwood Family.



Cover of the first American edition of Fritz Max Cahén's *Men Against Hitler*, 1939. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.



Day Neon, 1953, by Harold Town. Collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Gift of the artist's estate, 1994.

A group of internees behind the barbed wire fences at the Camp N internment camp in Sherbrooke, Quebec, on November 19, 1945. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, PA-114463.

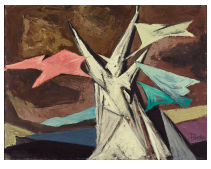
The Hero, 1933, by George Grosz. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Installation view of *Oscar Cahén Memorial Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1959. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

It Became Green, 1956, by Tom Hodgson. Collection of the Robert Mclaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, purchase 1971, © Tom Hodgson Estate, courtesy of the Christopher Cutts Gallery.

Members of the Painters Eleven during the Simpson's department store *Abstracts at Home* display, 1953. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

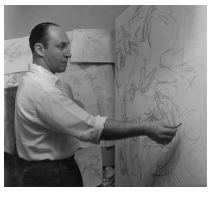
Michael, Oscar, and Mimi at their home in King Township, 1951. Photograph by Page Toles, Collection of The Cahén Archives.



The Old Tree, 1951, by Jack Bush. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © Estate of Jack Bush / SODRAC (2015).

Oscar and Beatrice photographed on the street in Montreal, c. 1943. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Oscar and Mimi at the drafting table in Montreal, c. 1943. Collection of The Cahén Archives.



Oscar Cahén at an easel, 1951. Photograph by Page Toles. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Oscar Cahén, right, and an unidentified couple visiting Zwinger Palace in Dresden, c. 1932. Collection of The Cahén Archives, © The Cahén Archives.

Oscar Cahén with a guitar, c. 1945. Photograph by Geraldine Carpenter. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

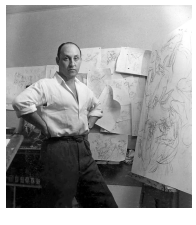
Oscar in his beloved Austin-Healey sports car. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Photograph of Cahén taken for an article in the Autumn 1950 issue of *Canadian Art* magazine. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Photograph of an internee in a camp uniform at Camp N in Sherbrooke, Quebec, c. 1940–42. Photograph by Marcell Seidler. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, PA-143492.

Photograph of lost painting, c. 1946. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Portrait of Dr. Heinrich Stadelmann, 1922, by Otto Dix. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, © Estate of Otto Dix / SODRAC (2015).



Portrait of Oscar Cahén in his studio in 1951. Photograph by Page Toles. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Portrait of Oscar Cahén on the staircase of his home in 1951. Collection of The Cahén Archives.

Poster designed by Vilém Rotter for the 1934 International Fair in Prague.

Procession, 1944, by Abraham Rattner. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

Thorn Trees, 1945, by Graham Sutherland. Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

BOOK CREDITS

Publisher
Sara Angel

Executive Editor

Kendra Ward

French Editorial Director
Dominique Denis

Image Research Director
John Geoghegan

Digital Layout Manager
Simone Wharton

Editor
Rick Archbold

Copy Editor
Lacey Decker Hawthorne

Translator
Eve Renaud

English Web Intern
Emily Derr

French Web Intern
Natalie Doak

Design Template
Studio Blackwell

ISBN 978-1-4871-0067-4

Art Canada Institute
Massey College, University of Toronto

4 Devonshire Place
Toronto, ON M5S 2E1

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Grove, Jaleen, author
Oscar Cahén : life & work / by Jaleen Grove.

Includes bibliographical references.
Contents: Biography – Key works – Significance & critical issues – Style & technique – Sources & resources – Where to see.
Electronic monograph.
ISBN 978-1-4871-0065-0 (pdf). –ISBN 978-1-4871-0063-6 (epub)

1. Cahén, Oscar, 1916-1956. 2. Cahén, Oscar, 1916-1956–Criticism and interpretation. 3. Painters–Canada–Biography. 4. Illustrators–Canada –Biography. I. Art Canada Institute, issuing body II. Title.

ND249.C237G76 2015 759.11 C2015-905498-2