

John Vanderpant and the Cultural Life of Vancouver, 1920-1939

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The Canadian photographer John Vanderpant (1884-1939) achieved world-wide recognition for his black and white images and was "a major influence on Canadian photography in the 1920s and 1930s."¹ He was also a major influence on the cultural development of the Vancouver area in those years. Vanderpant is an example of the patron who, according to Maria Tippett, helped to make Canadian culture "richly-textured, diversified, and spontaneous" in the period between the two world wars.² His endeavours to encourage the arts were extraordinary; his contributions to the cultural milieu of the West Coast are as unique and intriguing as his photography.

Vanderpant emigrated from Holland in 1911, but he did not become a permanent Canadian resident until 1913. At that time he settled in the beautifully rugged region of southern Alberta. Attracted by its resource-rich economy and scenic expanses, Vanderpant felt that the area offered viable employment possibilities and creative freedom. These were especially important to the young man as he was beginning a career as a portrait photographer, and he wanted to escape restricting European traditions.³ To Vanderpant's dismay, he found that the area was artistically isolated; he yearned for a more vibrant cultural environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that he began importing American and European publications and musical recordings in order to keep himself attuned to new and avant-garde movements. Over the years he would disseminate that information, and the ways in which he would do so were distinctive.

In 1919 Vanderpant moved from Fort Macleod to New Westminster, B.C. There he operated a successful portrait studio, and he began partici-

¹ Joan M. Schwartz, in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*: Volume IV, 2nd ed., s.v. "Vanderpant, John."

² Maria Tippett, *The Making of English-Canadian Culture, 1900-1939: The External Influences* (Downsview, Ont.: York University, 1988), 2.

³ Information given to the author from Vanderpant's daughter, Anna Ackroyd. All subsequent references to Anna Ackroyd will appear in the body of the text.

pating in the cultural life of the community. From 1922 to 1923 he was the vice-chairman of the art committee of British Columbia's Annual Provincial Exhibition (1869-1929), held under the auspices of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society; he was chairman from 1924 to 1928.⁴ Under his direction the Fine Arts section, which had "for years . . . languished and deteriorated into an annex to the display of women's work," grew to a large and diverse visual arts gallery.⁵

In 1920 Vanderpant inaugurated the New Westminster Photographic Salon; in 1923 it became an international salon. Fairgoers had the opportunity to view the work of local and international photographers. By 1925 "the number of prints . . . [displayed was] well over five hundred."⁶ Vanderpant supervised the jurying, hanging, judging, and returning of all the works. According to the 9 September 1924 issue of the *British Columbian*, the "international exhibit, . . . [is] one of striking proportions in addition to displaying many works of wonderful merit, from almost every part of the world. . . . The success of the photographic art display is attributable to the ability and the untiring zeal of Mr. J. Vanderpant."⁷

From 1919 to 1928, the National Gallery loaned paintings to the Provincial Exhibition, and works from the members of the Group of Seven were always included. Over the years Vanderpant became acquainted with the Group's work, and the artists themselves. Acceptance of the "new school" was slow in B.C., and Vanderpant became one of the painters' ardent supporters. He advocated their paintings in his lectures, many of which were accompanied by slides of the artists' work, along with examples of other "modern" paintings.⁸

⁴ In *John Vanderpant: Photographs* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), p. 16, Charles C. Hill notes that Vanderpant resigned from the art committee in 1927; however, he did not quit the position until 1928. In an article on page 2 of the 5 Sept. 1928 issue of the *British Columbian*, Vanderpant "announced that he had decided to retire and that . . . [1928 was] the last exhibition at which he would . . . be chairman of the Fine Arts Committee."

⁵ "Art Exhibit Is Worthy of Note," *British Columbian*, 29 Sept. 1920.

⁶ "Pictorial Photography," *British Columbian*, 10 Sept. 1925.

⁷ "Art Salon and Photographic Art Will Be Feature," *British Columbian*, 9 Sept. 1924.

⁸ Manuscripts in the Vanderpant Papers (National Archives of Canada, MG 30, D373) indicate that, besides those in his private collection, Vanderpant used lantern slides loaned from the National Gallery to complement his lectures: Emily Carr's *Gitwangak*, A. J. Casson's *Clearing*, L. L. Fitzgerald *Doc Snider's House*, Clarence Gagnon's *Village*, Lawren Harris's *Lake Superior* and *Maligne Lake*, Edwin Holgate's *Nude in Landscape*, Paul Kane's *White Mud Portage*, Cornelius Krieghoff's *White Landscape*, Arthur Lismer's *September Gale*, J. E. H. MacDonald's *Tangled Garden* and *The Solemn Land*, Paul Peel's *Venetian Bather*, G. D. Pepper's *Totem Poles*, Tom Thomson's *Northern River* and *The Jack Pine*, and F. H. Varley's *John* and *Georgian Bay*. Vanderpant's lantern slides (National Archives of Canada) include 170 of his images and 45 works by painters and photographers. Included are

Vanderpant held nationalist, mystical, and artistic tenets similar to those of the Group of Seven.⁹ These, and a close friendship with one of the Group's members, F. H. (Frederick) Varley (1881-1969), made him especially interested in their work. In a 1933 lecture, "Art in General; Canadian Painting in Particular," Vanderpant stated that he thought paintings by the Group of Seven were inspired by their intuitive desire "to express living, moody rhythms, movement in spaces, [and] the inevitable relationship between these forms." His own inspiration was derived from a similar desire to express "the consciousness of life . . . in aesthetic form, pattern, rhythm, and relationship."¹⁰

Vanderpant often championed the Group in local newspapers, calling it "a yearly privilege to draw the pen" on their behalf and "a glorious duty." In an article for Vancouver's *Daily Province*, Vanderpant wrote that the aim of the School of Seven is not representation, but interpretation. These men hold that a mere copy of the beauty in Nature always falls short of Nature itself, and that this attempt, therefore should not be made. . . .

[They] . . . felt that the immensity of Canada could not be truly painted with a European brush, . . . so they . . . went for the soul of our land . . . using freedom to emphasize either in form or color, what was personally most striking to interpret. . . .

What is urged is the unbiased, open mind required to come to an understanding of its [the Group of Seven's] aims, and so as to judge for oneself its achievements. . . .

. . . When Europe has recognized this Canadian movement, can the West afford to stay indifferent?¹¹

works by Emily Carr, F. H. Varley, Hans Arp, Raoul Dufy, Fernand Léger, Vladimir Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, Henri Matisse, László Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Amédée Ozenfant, Salomon Ruisdael, Kurt Schwitters, and Vincent Van Gogh.

⁹ A thorough discussion of the history and philosophy of the Group of Seven is given by Ann Davis in her unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *An Apprehended Vision: The Philosophy of the Group of Seven* (York University, 1973). Vanderpant's writings show that he believed that Canadian artists had to break away from European traditions and influences in order to create a "heroic vision" of their country. His writings also demonstrate that he shared spiritual beliefs similar to those of the Group's members, and that those beliefs were an impetus, as they were to the Group of Seven, to explore increasingly abstract images. As Charles C. Hill has pointed out in *John Vanderpant: Photographs*, Vanderpant's most successful work includes close-up studies of grain elevators and commonplace subjects such as vegetables.

¹⁰ John Vanderpant, untitled, undated manuscript. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references to Vanderpant's unpublished writings are from a collection that was made available to the author by Vanderpant's heirs. That collection, including copies of Vanderpant's published writings, is now held at the National Archives of Canada: MG 30, D373.

¹¹ John Vanderpant, "Art and Criticism," (letter to the editor), *Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 Aug. 1928; "Appreciates the Art Exhibition," *Vancouver Daily Province*, (letter to the editor), 18 Aug. 1927. Vanderpant's comment on European recogni-

Vanderpant's interests in promoting the arts also led him to join the British Columbia Art League (1920-1931). This group was responsible for the establishment of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts (V.S.D.A.A.), and the Vancouver Art Gallery. As an executive member, Vanderpant had a prominent role in the activities of the League. He also joined the B.C. Pictorialists, the Vancouver-New Westminster Photographers' Association, and the Photographers' Association of the Pacific Northwest; he held executive positions with these groups.

In 1926 Vanderpant and Harold Mortimer-Lamb (1872-1970: a retired mining engineer, art critic, and Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society) opened the Vanderpant Galleries at 1216 Robson Street, Vancouver. The partnership ended in 1927, and Vanderpant purchased Mortimer-Lamb's share of the business. Until Vanderpant's death in 1939, he and his gallery were to play a vital role in the city's cultural development.

Vanderpant believed that "the artless community is more intensely poverty stricken, than is the one penniless." When he wasn't tripping his camera shutters he was engaged in numerous activities which made new trends in art and music available to Vancouverites. He became a catalyst to the local art scene, promoting artists and art; and he exhibited the works of local, national, and international artists in his gallery.¹² This was important for three reasons: first, the general artistic tastes of the community were conservative; second, Vancouver did not have a civic art gallery until 1931; third, the work of European artists, especially those from Britain, were favoured over the work of Canadian and, in particular, B.C. artists.

Situated in a two-storey wooden building (the structure has been the site of La Côte d'Azur restaurant since 1969), Vanderpant's atelier was spacious and comfortable. The room contained a large fireplace and was furnished with ornate china, elegant antique chairs, oriental rugs, vases of flowers, candelabras, camera studies, and the works of local painters such as Frederick Varley, J. W. G. (Jock) Macdonald, Charles H. Scott, and Emily Carr. Over the years different groups such as the B.C. Art League, the Arts and Letters Club, the New Frontier Club, and the Van-

tion was a reference to the favourable reception given the Group of Seven by the British press when the Group exhibited at Wembley in 1924 and 1925.

¹² In the exhibition catalogue *First Class: Four Graduates from the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, 1929*, (Vancouver: Women in Focus Gallery, 1987), p. 14, Letia Richardson first described Vanderpant as a catalyst. She wrote that he, Frederick Varley, and Mortimer-Lamb "were a catalytic force which fueled the exuberance of the visual arts [in Vancouver] in the early 1930's."

couver Poetry Society used the gallery as a meeting place.¹³ Many notable Canadians, including Dorothy Livesay, Arthur Lismer, A. Y. Jackson, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Bliss Carman attended the gallery; others such as Philip Surrey, Jock Macdonald, and Frederick Varley were frequent visitors.

For eight years, 1928 to 1936, Vancouver's intellectual and artistic communities were drawn to musical evenings at the Vanderpant Galleries. Over the years others, including the painter Lawren Harris, were also to host musical evenings; however, Vanderpant's musicales appear to have been the first, to have been the longest running, to have attracted the largest audiences, and to have had the greatest impact on the community. His "music room," which could accommodate over 100, was usually filled. His "evenings" were particularly vital as, until 1930 when the Vancouver Symphony began a regular concert schedule, orchestral presentations in the city were infrequent. Moreover, the musical tastes of Vancouverites paralleled their conservative artistic tastes. John Becker has pointed out that "the most memorable aspect" of a concert given by Ravel "was the mass exodus of the audience during the first couple of pieces."¹⁴

On designated evenings guests would listen to selections from Vanderpant's extensive record collection, which included classical works by Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart, as well as "modern" works by Sibelius, Berlioz, Paganini, Ravel, Stravinsky, and the avant-garde German *Gebrauchsmusik*.¹⁵ Anna Ackroyd, Vanderpant's eldest daughter, remembers that her inventive father created a dual speaker system for his Columbia gramophone. "It had a heavy wood frame with a twelve to fifteen inch opening . . . in which was mounted a speaker identical to the gramophone speaker. He set the gramophone in one corner of the room, and set the other speaker

¹³ No records of the Arts and Letters Club appear to have survived. Information from a number of former members indicates that the group met once a month at the Vanderpant Galleries. There they would listen to guest speakers, selections from Vanderpant's recordings or piano recitals were enjoyed, and many topics were discussed. The dates on which the Club started and ended are not known; but former members think that the first meetings were held some time in the 1920s and that the last occurred some time during the Depression years. It is also not clear whether the club was initiated by Vanderpant, or Harold Mortimer-Lamb, or whether they were both responsible; however, none of those interviewed can remember Mortimer-Lamb ever being in attendance.

A letter from Dorothy Livesay to Vanderpant, dated 9 May 1937, (Vanderpant Papers, National Archives of Canada) indicates that at least one of the "literary gatherings" of the New Frontier Club were held at the Vanderpant Galleries.

¹⁴ John Becker, *Discord: The Story of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra* (Vancouver: Brighthouse Press, 1989), 6.

¹⁵ This information comes from Anna Ackroyd, and from Peter Varley's published recollection, "John Vanderpant: A Memory," in *John Vanderpant: Photographs* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 10.

in an opposite corner. Both speakers were about three feet off the floor. The tone was fantastic.”

Anna also recalls that students from the V.S.D.A.A., the short-lived British Columbia College of Arts (1933-1935), and the University of British Columbia were invited on different nights of alternate months to “drop in for refreshments, sit on the [carpeted] floor . . . and listen. And if they wanted to talk, they talked; otherwise, there would be evenings when nobody said anything and after the concert they just tiptoed out. . . . They just loved it.”

Ivan Denton, a reporter for a Vancouver newspaper called the *West End Breeze*, attended one of the evening concerts in 1933, and his published description conveys a sense of wonder, enjoyment, and stimulation.

I came rather late on a dismal, rainy night. Mr. Vanderpant’s musical evenings begin at the unfashionable hour of 8 o’clock. How shall I describe the room? — it was dim, spacious — great bulks of shadow were balanced by lighted spaces. Like a canvas perfectly composed — no one part of the composition of that picture could have been taken away without marring the completeness of its sombre beauty. Many people, sitting in the shadow, made up part of the picture.

Surely in a room like this something interesting must take place — so I waited for it to happen. At the far end — a long way off it seemed — a wood fire burned briskly on an open hearth, and on the high mantel shelf, the light quivered from three wax tapers, held aloft in an old Sheffield candleabra [*sic*]. It seemed at this moment a crying shame that electric lights had even been conceived.

The room was filled with the sound of a great symphony. . . . I am trying to think how I would describe this music — it was like moving masses of color — chords as vibrant as the crash of a waterfall — melodies as delicate and elfin as the pipes of Pan. I likened the music also to the shadows and lighted spaces of the room — or the thunderous rhythm of old Latin verses quoted by a master steeped in classic lore.

Outside, in the murk and the wet, the great world-wide depression prowled like a lean old wolf. If you had been there with me you would understand what I mean and what I felt. I cannot quite put it into words. For instance, I saw the hands of a girl near me — shapely hands they were — sometimes relaxed and sometimes tense — I saw the diminutive spheres of her amber earrings swing to and fro, catch the candlelight and shatter it into a thousand splinters of yellow radiance.

For quite apart from the music at Mr. Vanderpant’s old house on Robson Street, there is both time and inclination to delight in such jocund beauty as a swaying earring in the light of a candle.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ivan Denton, “Surely in a Room Like This, Something Interesting Must Take Place,” *West End Breeze* vol. 1 (13 April 1933); copy in the Vanderpant Papers, National Archives of Canada.

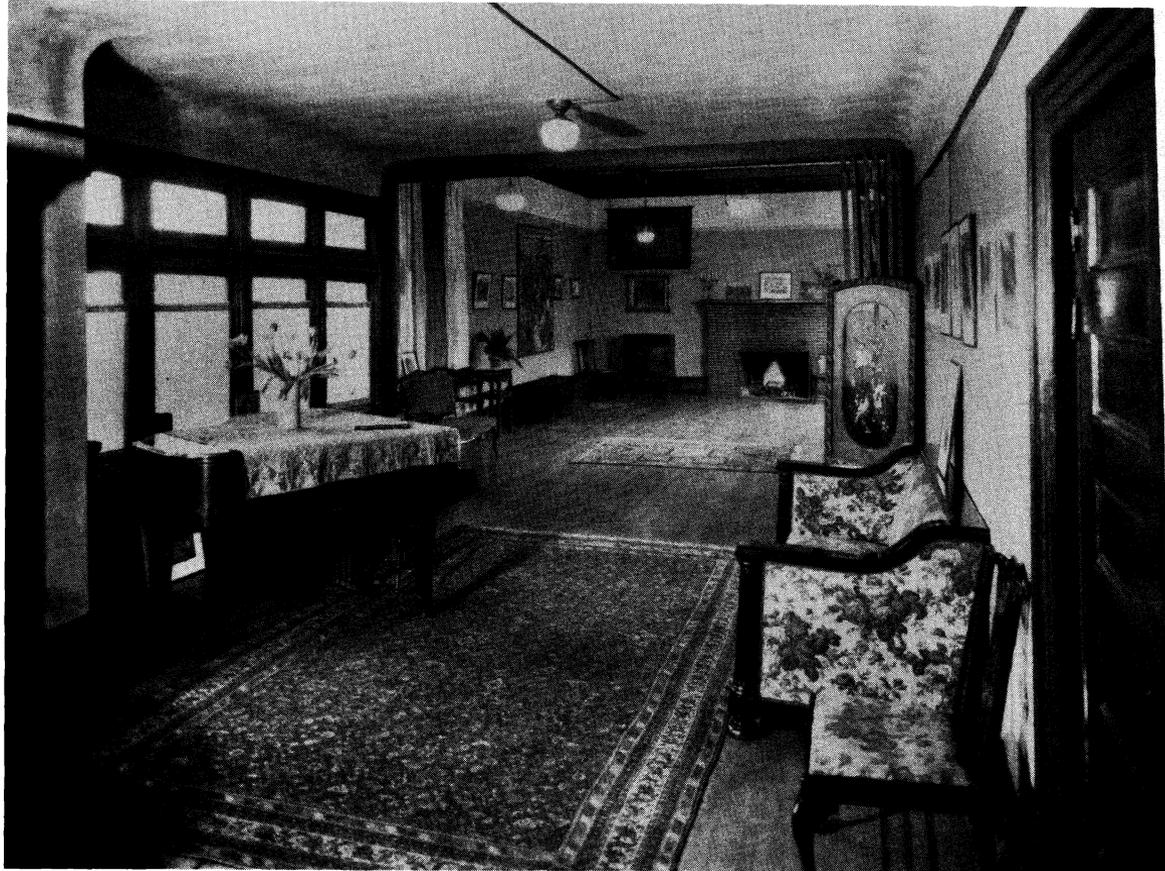


PLATE 1

Interior view of the Vanderpant Galleries, circa 1928. The back room was used for taking patrons' portraits, for the musicales, and for any gatherings hosted by Vanderpant. The large painting on the left wall is Frederick Varley's, *The Immigrants*. (Photograph courtesy of the Vanderpant family.)

The musical evenings were a special event for the city's art students. Margaret Williams, who was a student at the V.S.D.A.A. and later taught at the British Columbia College of Arts, recalls that going to Vanderpant's "was so wonderful because he introduced us to all sorts of things that were modern then [and] that we didn't know about . . . and [he] contributed very much to our education and pleasure."¹⁷

For the B.C. painter, Irene Hoffar Reid, the musicales were

a wonderful experience. . . . I remember the feeling of music pouring over me. In particular, I recall hearing a very modern composition. It was more strident and unharmonious than Stravinsky. . . . It was like seeing an abstract painting for the first time.

. . . I was shocked and amazed. I think that was Vanderpant's aim: to expose us to new "ways."¹⁸

Anna recalls that in 1936, in another attempt to present Vancouverites with challenging musical experiences, her father "arranged with one of the local radio stations [CKFC] to do a half-hour, weekly, modern music radio show. He provided his own narrative on the history of the composer, and . . . the music." Every Wednesday, from 4:00 to 4:30, Vanderpant played what he described as "the recorded music of modern composers seldom or never heard in British Columbia." He was aware of the initial effect his selections would have and tried to prepare the listeners for contemporary pieces by composers such as Roy Harris, Constant Lambert, Francis Poulenc, and Sergei Prokofiev. He counselled the audience "to listen rather than to hear. Only in active listening rather than passive hearing lays the progress of musical appreciation." He also suggested that if the music sounded "strange" or "weird," it was "better to be . . . disturbed at first than by immediately agreeing with certain melodic developments . . . [and that] listening with irritation is far more enriching than 'hearing'." Apparently, Vancouverites and/or the management did not like "irritation," for the program was cancelled after three months.

Vanderpant also seems to have worked behind the scenes to encourage the presentation of modern musical compositions. In 1934 the Hart House String Quartet gave two concerts in Vancouver. Peter Varley, son of the painter Frederick Varley, recalls:

The first concert kept to safe ground. The second, however, was to cause "R.J.", the critic, to write: "True, some of the listeners did find much food

¹⁷ From an interview conducted by Ann Pollack, 1969, and held at the National Gallery of Canada.

¹⁸ Irene Hoffar Reid, interview with author, 7 December 1989.

for thought, but the majority must have wondered at times what it was all about. . . .”

The program consisted of two works: Respighi's *Doric Quartet* and Ernest Bloch's *Quartet in B Minor*. It is likely that John Vanderpant had a hand in selecting the program.¹⁹

Another of Vanderpant's initiatives appears to have indirectly led to the establishment of Malkin Bowl in Stanley Park. He thought that outdoor symphony concerts would be enjoyed by enthusiasts and, at the same time, would familiarize others with classical music. According to Anna, her father also felt that outdoor summer concerts “would help increase attendance at the winter symphony concerts.” (In 1988, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra again began presenting outdoor summer concerts to bolster its season ticket sales.) He thought that “the perfect spot was a gently sloping grass area [below the dining facility known as the Pavilion] in Stanley Park . . . Father invited [the conductor of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Allard] de Ridder to view the area . . . [and he] was most enthused. The Symphony Society was approached, and agreed to the concert. My father met with Mr. Willie Dalton, a prominent businessman who, in turn, involved . . . Mr. Malkin.” In 1934 William Harold Malkin (1868-1959), a wealthy businessman who was an active participant in Vancouver's cultural affairs, donated a shell-style bandstand to the Parks Board as a memorial to his late wife, Marion. It replaced an earlier structure (erected in 1911) on which the Vancouver City Band had “played only martial or religious music.”²⁰ Anna remembers that “Symphony in the Park . . . was always well attended . . . [and] during the Great Depression, people had free food for the soul and spirit, via beautiful music, as my father had hoped.” Today, Malkin Bowl is used to stage Theatre Under the Stars: outdoor theatrical productions presented during the summer months.

Vanderpant's influence was always invigorating. In 1927, under the auspices of the B.C. Pictorialists, of which he was then president, Vanderpant's gallery hosted an International Salon of Pictorial Photography. According to Charles C. Hill (p. 18, *John Vanderpant: Photographs*) it was the first international salon to be held in Vancouver. The exhibition must have been especially exciting to the city's growing number of amateur photographers. From 23 June to 9 July, 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Van-

¹⁹ Peter Varley, *Frederick H. Varley*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1983), 26.

²⁰ Richard M. Steele, *The Stanley Park Explorer* (North Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1987), 129.

couverites were free to view 140 prints from Austria, Holland, Spain, Germany, the U.S.A., Italy, England, and Belgium. The twelve photographers included in the exhibition were, for the most part, noted participants in the salon circuit. This was especially true of H. Berssenbrugge (Holland); Julius Aschauer, F.R.P.S. (Austria); Francis O. Libby, F.R.P.S. (U.S.A.); and Alexander Keighley, Hon. F.R.P.S. (England).²¹

In 1931 the Vanderpant Galleries held two significant and stimulating exhibitions. In April the work of B.C.'s most modern artists — Frederick Varley, Jock Macdonald, Emily Carr, C. H. Scott, M. S. Maynard, W. P. Weston — was displayed, as was that of three promising young painters — Fred Amess, Irene Hoffar (Reid), and Vera Weatherbie. According to Vancouver's *Daily Province*, "One of the definite [*sic*] objects of having the exhibition . . . was to give the purchasing committee . . . [of the new Civic Art Gallery] an opportunity of viewing the type of work that British Columbia artists produce."²² (It is interesting to note that according to the Vancouver Art Gallery's acquisition files, it took six more years for the gallery to follow Vanderpant's encouragement to purchase the paintings of B.C.'s then most intriguing artists: in 1937 Emily Carr's *Totem Poles — Kitseukla* was acquired; in 1938, the gallery bought Jock Macdonald's *Indian Burial, Nootka*, and Carr's *Loggers' Culls*.)

In September the Vanderpant Galleries exhibited the photography of two Americans, Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976) and Edward Weston (1886-1958). This was the first Canadian showing for Cunningham and the second for Weston. (In 1914, he exhibited ten prints with the Toronto Camera Club.) For Vancouverites, it was a stimulating example of the new "pure photography." In her view of the exhibition, columnist Rita Myers wrote:

No tricks of the camera are relied on to lend glamor to the work, only the pure form of the subject, plus imagination of the artists in arrangement and placing of lights and shadows, is drawn on for results. It is photography at its most modern point, where the absence of detail emphasizes the mood of the picture.²³

Vanderpant also included a number of his prints in the exhibition. Unfortunately, other than those mentioned in Myers's review, there are no

²¹ *International Master Salon of Pictorial Photography, held under the auspices of the B.C. Pictorialists* (exhibition catalogue; Vancouver: Vanderpant Galleries, 1927). This catalogue is in the Vanderpant Papers, National Archives of Canada.

²² "In the Domain of Art," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 12 Apr. 1931.

²³ "In the Domain of Art," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 20 Sept. 1931.

records to indicate which prints were hung. Overall, there must have been quite a sampling: Cunningham, alone, sent forty-seven prints.²⁴

Vanderpant also had literary interests. Before emigrating to Canada, he had attended the universities of Amsterdam and Leiden, where he studied literature and the history of language. In his youth Vanderpant had written prose and poetry, and a number of his early writings were published in Dutch literary magazines. In the 1920s and 1930s he wrote numerous articles for American and Dutch photographic journals, and prepared lectures on art and photography for Canadian and American audiences.

Vanderpant joined the Vancouver Poetry Society (1916-1974) and was an active member until his death. The man and his studio became well known to the members of the Society and their guests. Like other members, Vanderpant took his turn hosting the literary evenings. The ambience of his gallery made it such an ideal meeting place that from 1931 to 1932 the Society held all its meetings there for a nominal fee. By 1933 the Depression was taking its toll on the Society's finances, and the executive decided that meetings would again have to be held in members' homes. The Vanderpant Galleries continued to be used on a rotating basis and for special occasions: for example, a "Soiree" in honour of Charles G. D. Roberts and the Canadian Authors' Association was held in 1936, and approximately one hundred guests attended; from 1932 to 1939, an annual "Gala Night" to mark the close of the Poetry Society's yearly activities was held at the Galleries.²⁵

In addition to poetry readings, the Vancouver Poetry Society asked special lecturers to present papers on art and literature. The guest speakers included writer Dorothy Livesay, editor and poet Alan Crawley, and such noted University of British Columbia academics as Dr. G. G. Sedgewick, Dr. A. F. B. Clark, and Dr. Hunter Lewis. From 1930 to 1939 Vanderpant not only read some of his poems and "lively compositions," but also presented a number of lectures, some of which were illustrated with lantern slides depicting a variety of art works. A few of his topics, which were also presented to other audiences or published in journals, included "Concerning Matters Artistic," "Art in General; Canadian Art in Particular," and "Endeavors in Expression." The diversity of his lecture topics ranged from Surrealism, modern poetry, education, patriotism, and electric music, to the 1930s architecture of Vancouver which he felt "lacked originality."

²⁴ From a list of prints, dated 10 Sept. 1931, that Cunningham sent to Vanderpant. This information was provided by The Imogen Cunningham Trust, California.

²⁵ From the minutes of *The Vancouver Poetry Society* MSS 294, Vancouver City Archives.

Minutes of the Poetry Society indicate that Vanderpant's lectures often resulted in both "a somewhat controversial discussion" and an "inspiring evening."²⁶

Vanderpant's poetry was not as successful as his photography. The lyrical nature of his photographic titles, however, was an important facet of his work. His poetic imagination also proved useful for his prose. For example, he wrote: "Spoken words about art are like butterflies, they hover about, they hesitate — they touch — but they never enter its essence — which is the silence of understanding expressed in balanced action."

Although he often wrote verses that reflect images of nature, perhaps his most poignant poem is one that sardonically highlights the plight of the Canadian artist — a topic that was always paramount to Vanderpant.

The Poor Contemporary

A buoyant artist (one can hardly laugh or blame
him for his pride) called at the hall of fame
and knocked . . . no answer . . . knocked with care again . . .
then somewhere asked a voice: "Can you explain

why this abode should open to your glam'rous claim
and in its golden halls, your greatness entertain?"
"Well," spake the artist, "Did I paint and work in vain
there are a hundred noble works signed with my name!"

Then looked he wond'ring at the great blind walls, no door
or window opened to his ent'ring, so he knocked again:
"Would please for once the voice its silence now explain?"

And through the golden dome it did respond once more:
"My artist friend, you are not wholly bad, not that,
but too alive; to enter here you must be dead!"

In 1937, Jock Macdonald referred to Vanderpant as "the only 'living' being" in Vancouver. After Vanderpant's death Macdonald wrote: "The city seems different without Vanderpant around."²⁷ The impact of Vanderpant's artistry and his vibrant character have not, however, been lost. He has left a unique legacy: his photographs, negatives, lantern slides, and writings; and a significant contribution to the cultural development of this country. In his photography, Vanderpant sought to convey an interpreta-

²⁶ Mss 294, Vancouver City Archives.

²⁷ Jock Macdonald, Vancouver, to John Varley, Nootka, 8 December 1936; copy in the Burnaby Art Gallery; Macdonald to John Varley, Ottawa, 9 September 1939; copy in the Burnaby Art Gallery.

tion of reality that went beyond the surfaces of his subjects so that they carried an “underlying vibration.”²⁸ His impact on the West Coast also went beyond the surfaces and carried an “underlying vibration” that reverberates through our cultural history.

²⁸ English was a second language for Vanderpant; consequently, spelling and usage mistakes sometimes occur in his writing. The author has corrected his phrase “underlying vibrations” to read “underlying vibrations.”