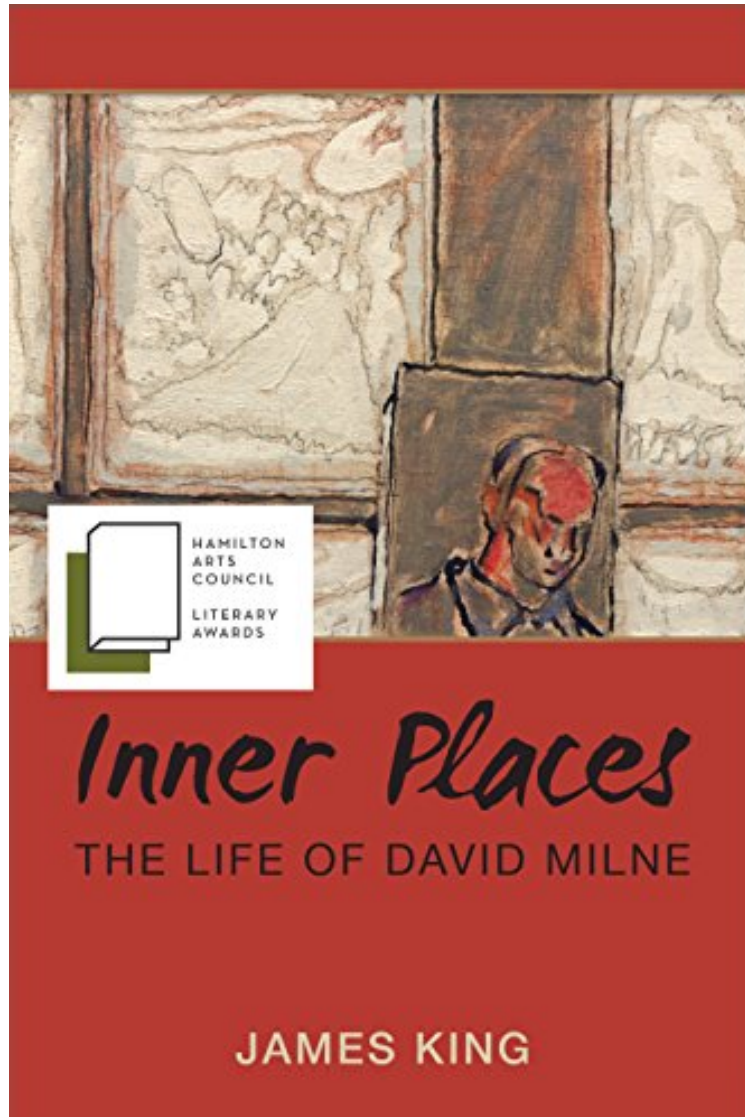


Inner Places: The Life of David Milne

James King

*ePub / *DOC / audiobook / ebooks / Download PDF*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#3454667 in eBooks 2015-08-08 2015-08-08 File Name: B00NBYZREG | File size: 23.Mb

James King : Inner Places: The Life of David Milne before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Inner Places: The Life of David Milne:

David Milne was a modernist who broke the mould. In a precarious and roving life, he captured the texture of every place he lived in a different kind of landscape painting. Inner Places opens a window on Milne's constant spirit, his struggles to survive, and the many personal and professional lives of this Canadian original.

Kingsquos text is accessible and prettily illustratedhellip;Milnersquos life history is narrated with aplombhellip; (Toronto Star)Clearly and crisply written, and lavishly illustrated with colour plates of Milnersquos work as well as his personal black and white photographs, this biography is an effective tribute to an artist who contributed greatly to the modernist art scene in Canada until the mid-20th century. (Ontario Historical Society Bulletin)About the AuthorJames King is the author of six novels and nine biographies, the subjects of which include William Blake, Margaret Laurence, Jack McClelland, Farley Mowat, and Lawren Harris. His biography of Herbert Read, *The Last Modern*, was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award. James King, who is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, lives in Hamilton, Ontario.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.PREFACE David Milne is one of Canadasquos finest artists, and in many ways he remains, sixty years after his death, an isolated figure. His pictures are usually not quite as bright as, say, many of the masterpieces by the members of the Group of Seven. Unlike them, he did not link his work with his countrysquos national destiny. In fact, he lived much of his adult life outside his native land. He was, for long periods of time, a quasi-recluse. Milne was also the artist as intellectual, someone who wrote about his aesthetic practice in considerable detail. In this sense, he is regarded, quite rightly, as ldquo;an artistsquos artist.rdquo; And yet few painters have been so thoroughly grounded in the strong, intense feelings that an artist can derive from his work ? and he wanted his viewers to experience those emotions. For Milne, creating art was his life. Once he determined to devote his life to becoming an artist, that unfolding process dominated his existence. Put a slightly different way, his life was his art. Milne sacrificed material comfort for the ldquo;thrillrdquo; or ldquo;kickrdquo; of creating art. He is the embodiment of the notion of an artist whose life is devoted to art for artsquos sake. This biography is about the emotional and professional life of a man who took enormous pleasure in making art. From the outside, at first glance, Milnersquos life may not seem exciting, but in fact his quest was an exhilarating one in which he battled, heroically, to conquer all kinds of adversity to snare the perfect image. That search is the stuff of legend. Who was David Milne? He was born in rural Ontario in 1881 and trained as an artist at the Art Students League in New York City. In 1912 he married Patsy Hegarty and moved to Boston Corners in upstate New York. He volunteered to serve in the Canadian Army during the First World War and worked as a war artist in England, France, and Belgium. He returned to Boston Corners in 1919 and lived in a variety of places in the surrounding areas. He returned to Canada in 1929 and painted in Temagami, Weston, and Palgrave, Ontario. He separated from his wife in 1933 and moved to Six Mile Lake. In 1938 he met his second wife, Kathleen Pavey. Their son, David, was born in 1941. In the later years of his career, he painted in Toronto, Uxbridge, Baptiste Lake, and Bancroft, where he died on December 26, 1953. Milne is best known as a landscape painter, but he was also particularly adept at still lifes (especially of flowers), interior views of rooms, and, late in his career, ldquo;subjectrdquo; pictures. In one attempt to define himself, Milne wrote: ldquo;I have the broad, short fingers of the peasant. I have too the taste for few and simple things, extending to an almost abnormal dislike for, and impatience with, possessions that are more than bare necessities. I like to think that my leaning toward simplicity in art is a translation of hereditary thrift, of stinginess into a more attractive medium.rdquo;2 David Milne, the man who reduced life to essentials, found happiness in nature: ldquo;on a bright day you go outside and stand for a moment. A load falls from your shoulders. You feel thrilled, uplifted, serene, content, stimulated ? why?rdquo;3 Trying to answer that difficult question was a pursuit to which he devoted his life. An artist like himself, Milne believed, obtained an ldquo;impression from some phase of nature.rdquo; Having gained the ldquo;impression,rldquo; he did not attempt to reproduce the scene before his eyes. Rather, he had to discover what ldquo;stirred him and to translate it into an arrangement of colour and line.rdquo;4 The artist Peter Doig has put it this way: ldquo;I really like it when the reduction in [Milnersquos] work becomes extreme: black mountains, black interiors, almost negatives of space.rdquo;5 Milne idolized nature (botany was his favourite subject in high school). Its intricacies fascinated him, but he often felt that it acted like a cruel mistress who, when she wanted, could withdraw her favours. And so he assiduously courted nature. Often, he became one with nature ? even in moments that elicited a moment of terror ? alone in the bush on a dark night with a high wind, he became excited and pleased. When separated from the animals of the forest, he lamented, ldquo;I miss my partners, a few chipmunks and birds and owls and porcupines.rdquo;6 For Milne the landscape artist, nature was much more than mere trees, forests, mountains, and lakes. In nature, Milne saw a reflection of the divinity within himself. As an adult, he did not believe in the Presbyterian God of his childhood, but throughout his life he saw the meaning of his existence written in nature. In that sense, he was a deeply spiritual artist who distinguished between the spiritual forest and mundane trees. As a child, he was ldquo;brought face to face with Infinity where anything might be and anything might happen.rdquo;7 The pursuit of infinity ? the presence of the divine in nature ? became a lifelong preoccupation. Milne incorporated a wide variety of Christian symbolism in his ldquo;subjectrdquo; pictures in the last twelve years of his life. In those images ? which he never discussed in terms of their allegorical import ? he revisited his early knowledge of the Bible, especially the New Testament. In a curious way, the spiritual import of his early, middle, and late landscapes flowed into the depiction of stories and parables that are specifically concerned with transcendence. From beginning to end, Milne was an artist spellbound by the spiritual existence at the edge of the material world. The allure of the otherworldly is a constant in his career, although that fascination took many different forms. What is the lifeblood of David Milnersquos art? What makes him a great

artist? What does a David Milne look like? To begin with, he extracted the essentials from any subject he painted. He put it this way: "The thing that makes a picture is the thing that makes dynamite ? compression";⁸ Milne's simplicity of line, his precise use of colour, and his adroit use of texture compel his viewers to see and experience something thrilling of which they were not previously aware. Great artists have this effect on their audiences: they change their lives. As opposed to Lawren Harris, who thought in monumental, epic terms, David Milne is a lyrical artist, one who espouses his sensibility in small, intimate pictures. *[INSERT FOOTNOTE P-1]

Milne often claimed that subject matter was secondary in his image-making: he insisted he was in pursuit of the ecstasy he experienced during moments of creation. He once put it this way: his paintings and drawings had "little appeal to sentiment";⁹ but were, rather, "simplifications of colour and line" that led to moments of elation. Milne's pursuit of such moments was integral to his sense of himself as a person. In worldly terms, David Milne paid dearly for his commitment to a life pursued single-mindedly for art. In 1934, he asked: "I have been painting for over a quarter of a century, steadily, and very, very few of the pictures done have been sold, most of them have never been exhibited, more than half have never been seen by any interested eye except my own. Have they any value?"¹⁰ This biography attempts to answer that rhetorical question. In addition to being a prolific artist, Milne was a copious writer. He composed an autobiography. He wrote essays on a wide variety of topics. He authored countless letters. As such, he is an excellent guide to how he saw and experienced his existence. I have not hesitated to allow Milne to speak freely in this biography. In turn funny, witty, anxious, angry, and exuberant, he is an amiable companion who speaks spontaneously and honestly of the issues that beset him. If we wish to understand his art, he provides many clues ? and often does so in an engaging, open manner. A biography should bring its subject to life so that the reader obtains a great deal of knowledge about how that person saw the world. A biographer can accumulate a great many useful facts to trace objectively a person's life experiences, but the reader ultimately wants to know the subject. This kind of intimacy is sometimes hard to come by, but Milne provides a great deal of evidence about his own subjectivity. In this book, I have tried to blend the objective and the subjective in such a way so as to create as faithful a portrait as possible of the real David Milne. Even from his earliest years in New York City, Milne inserted autobiographical elements into his oils and watercolours. There is another way of making this observation. Although David Milne wrote an autobiography, authored many letters and, at times, kept a journal, he reserved the recording of his inner self to his paintings, drawings, and prints. There, on display for anyone who cares to look, he laid bare his existence. A man who peered deeply into nature in order to understand his life, he precisely charted in his pictures his sojourn upon the earth. In particular, more than most artists, Milne wrote candidly about the process of making images, about the tremendous excitement he felt when he had accomplished what he set out to do. The life-writer must pay attention to these remarks, but he must also carefully, as I have suggested, sift through Milne's diaries and letters to uncover the private side of a man who may have been open about his artistic feelings but carefully guarded his personal ones. In fact, Milne avoided talking about the meaning of his images. He was always concerned about how successfully he had elicited or captured a subject; he discussed his work in terms of colour values. He insisted he was interested in form rather than content, as if these two things can readily be separated from each other. Nevertheless, in those remarks he leaves many hints to guide the viewer in understanding his work. As far as he was concerned, it was not his job to interpret his paintings. In reality, Milne was an extremely self-referential artist. In order to understand his inner world, his works of art must be read as pieces of autobiography. In the history of Western art, many artists portrayed the world in which they lived. For example, some male artists paint portraits of their wives or mistresses, or they show these women in domestic interiors, or they use the rooms in which they live as starting points for compositions. There is nothing startling in such practices. Milne was drawn to this kind of representation. Additionally, some artists, such as Vuillard, Matisse, and Milne, choose to insert themselves in subtle (sometimes, not so subtle) ways into their compositions. A favourite book will be on display, a work of art created by the artist will be shown, the tools (such as paint brushes or easels) of the artist's trade will be incorporated into a still life, or a self-portrait will include part of a room's interior. Milne made many such images. In Milne's late work, there are pictures that contain a fascinating mix of biblical imagery in which he reinvented his life in mythological terms. He transformed himself, in turn, into Noah, St. Francis of Assisi, and Christ Risen from the Dead. What was implied early in his work became fully explicit later on. Milne shied away from putting intimate thoughts into words. Instead, he inserted such reflections into his paintings. In order to uncover David Milne the man, his biographer must be prepared to use the paintings as evidence to uncover the man who created them. Specifically, Milne underwent many transformations in style during his career ? these can be especially glimpsed in how a new place and its accompanying surroundings would lead him to new forms of stylistic expression. This is to be expected of a painter whose career was centred on landscape, since he intently studied each locale in which he lived and was sensitive to how each differed from the other. Those differences are then encapsulated in his art because every new setting engendered a new response. I have called this book *Inner Places* because Milne's inner world is depicted in his paintings, especially his landscapes and later "subject" pictures, and because his inner world shifts markedly during his career. The ups and downs of Milne's inner life can be discerned by paying close attention to these changes. As he once said: "The man changes, and with that, the painting."¹¹ Why do we

still need David Milne? In him we behold a man who gave his all to the creation of works of art in which the possibility of renewal and rebirth exist. In him we witness a man who dared to be his own person. In him we see a man who challenged the claims of materialism. Like many great painters, Milne created his own distinct world. Moreover, this book is about a man who risked everything in the service of his art. By ordinary reckoning, Milne paid a heavy price for his creativity. By his own estimation, however, he accomplished what he set out to do. His legacy endures in the wondrous paintings and prints in which he charted his progress.