

# PEYTON WRIGHT

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## William Ronald

(Canadian Painter, 1928-1998)

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Founder of a group called Painters Eleven in Canada, William Ronald was born in Stratford and raised in Fergus and Brampton. He also did a series of portraits in Abstract Expressionist style of Prime Ministers including Pierre Trudeau. Upon graduation from the Ontario College of Art, where he was a hockey player, William Ronald went directly to New York to study for six months with Abstract Expressionist Hans Hofmann, having won a \$1,000.00 scholarship from the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association.

Living in the 'big city' was a heady experience for Ronald, whose residence was on 2nd Avenue in a noisy, Jewish neighborhood "Of street vendors, delicatessens and clothing stores". He took advantage of the cultural offerings and, leaving for Canada, he determined to return to New York.

In Ontario, he became a display artist for a home furnishings store, and involved 10 artists like himself in an abstract expressionist exhibition held February 1954. The group became known as Painters Eleven and included himself plus Alexandra Luke, Harold Town, Oscar Cahen, Kazuo Nakamura, Jack Bush, Hortense Gordon, Walter Yarwood, Ray Mead, Tom Hodgson and Jock Macdonald. Their work was described as "aggressive and challenging".

After this first exhibition of Painters Eleven, Ronald moved back to New York City where in April, 1956, the Painters Eleven exhibited at the Riverside Museum at the 20th Anniversary of American Abstract Artists because of contacts made by Ronald. In turn, he had a solo exhibition in November 1959 in Toronto at the Greenwich Gallery. Also, he began selling paintings to major collectors including Countess Ingeborg de Beausac who threw a large party to feature her acquisition of one of Ronald's paintings. Dealer Samuel Kootz was a guest, and subsequently represented the artist. William Ronald's first solo exhibition opened in April, 1957 in New York, and he received positive reviews as well as reinforcement from leading Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko and Franz Kline.

For seven years, he produced 18 canvases a year for Samuel Kootz, but Kootz then terminated the relationship, which was a major shock to Ronald who by that time, had settled his studio in New Jersey. Sensing correctly that the Abstract Expressionism was running its course, William Ronald moved back to Toronto and did painting that combined Abstraction and Surrealism.

However, to make a living he became a television broadcaster, working for CBC-TV and then CBC-FM. But he continued painting, which included a large mural for the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 1968. He had museum exhibitions and gallery shows, and did his series of 16

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images, called *The Prime Ministers of Canada*. They were featured in an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario with the host being Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

William Ronald died in 1998, having suffered much heart trouble and arthritis in his later years. However, he seemed to find much enjoyment in his later years. A description of him is that: ". . . the outrageousness, the wildness, the outspokenness, the vitality and fun of William Ronald are still there. He has recently purchased a used Rolls Royce, metallic sand with dark green leather upholstery. His two comely female assistants drive him around because he hasn't driven for 12 years. He rides in the back seat behind dark sunglasses enjoying his celebrity."

William Ronald's works are found in numerous private and public collections, including Museum of Modern Art, NYC; Guggenheim Museum, NYC; Whitney Museum of Art, NYC; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; Guggenheim Museum, NYC; Art Institute of Chicago; Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Brooklyn Museum, NYC; Hirshhorn Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.