

An Executive's Ivory Tower

By PETER DESBARATS

The customary portrait of the modern artist as a young man with fire in his eye and hair on his face underwent a drastic revision last night at the Agnes Lefort Gallery on Sherbrooke street west.

The occasion was a "vernissage" with the usual trappings — cocktails, critics, distinguished guests and an array of puzzling paintings. Only one thing seemed to be missing. There was no artist in paint-spattered dungarees, beard, sandals and sunglasses.

A casual visitor to the opening of the Colin Haworth exhibition would have been hard pressed to locate Mr. Haworth. Certainly he would never have picked the heavy-set executive standing in a corner of the gallery, calmly puffing his pipe and sipping ginger ale.

Despite his unruffled appearance, Mr. Haworth last night was wandering somewhat experimentally in "no man's land."

Double Exposure

On one side were the professional artists, looking askance at the amateur who was venturing to hold a one-man show in the hallowed preserves of a Sherbrooke street gallery. On the other hand were Mr. Haworth's business friends, wondering what abstract art has to do with a life composed of office work, three children, two cars, a beagle hound and a home in Montreal West.

Mr. Haworth obstinately refuses to follow the norms of either group. From nine to five every weekday, he works in a Montreal office as a public relations executive. Early in the morning and late at night, he stands before an easel in the dining room of his suburban home and paints. In this age of specialization, he represents a successfully split personality.

"You can learn to departmentalize your life," he maintained in an interview last night. "In

business, it's normal for a man to switch his attention rapidly between various subjects.

"I never sit around waiting for inspiration when I paint. I haven't time. If I have 20 minutes to spare, I'll paint for 20 minutes."

No Simple Formula

Mr. Haworth's formula, of course, isn't as simple as it sounds. Its basic ingredient is an ability to work hard and steadily at an essentially frustrating creative process.

Only seven years ago, he was an apparently normal executive with a superior flair for doodling. On an impulse, he decided in 1954 to join an evening art class at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

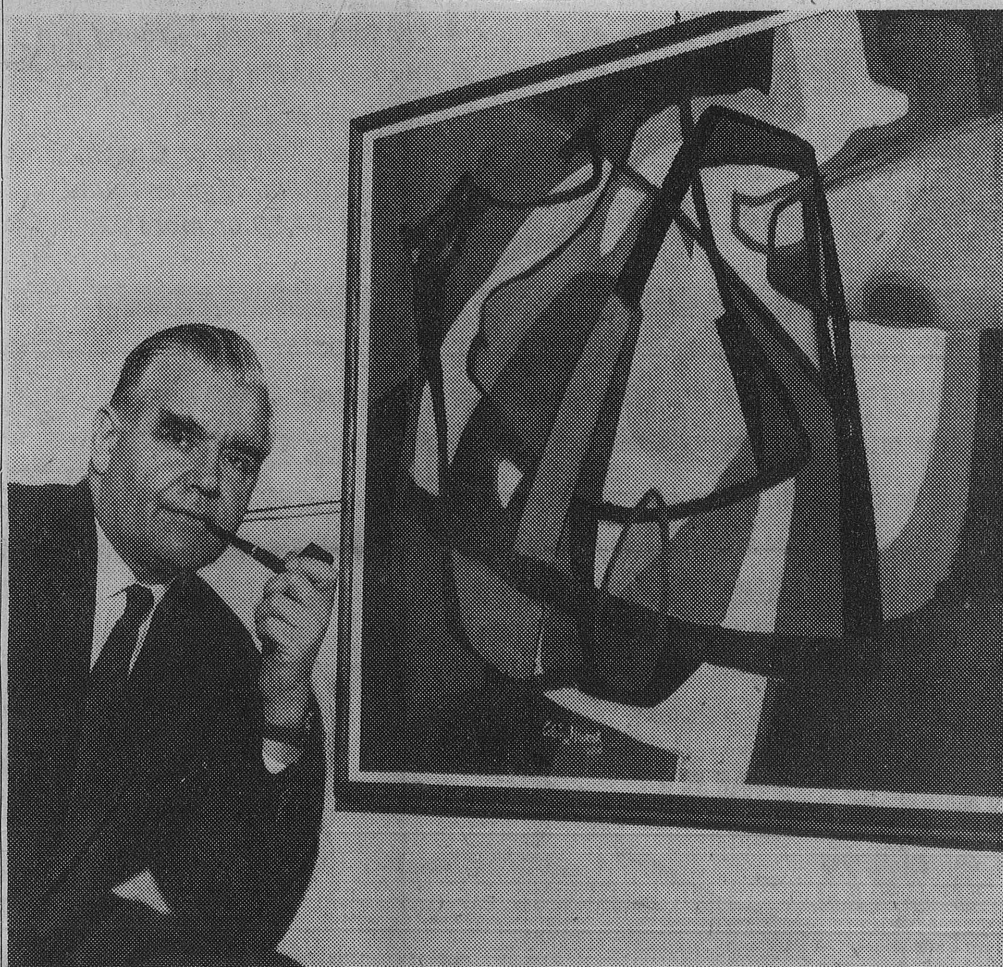
Thousands of Montrealers have attended these classes since they were first organized by Dr. Arthur Lismer. Most people leave them after a year with a heightened appreciation of art and their own artistic limitations. Mr. Haworth attended the classes for three years. At home, the dining-room table was moved aside to make room for a permanent easel. The sideboard eventually disappeared beneath a load of canvases and sketch pads.

Painting in a strictly representational style at first, Mr. Haworth found a ready if highly unprofitable market for his work among relatives and business acquaintances. Then, about three years ago, his work became increasingly abstract. Friends who had eagerly accepted his deft landscapes began to look dubiously at the patterns of form and color now emerging from the Haworth home.

The "hobby" became almost embarrassingly serious. Mr. Haworth started rising at 6.30 a.m. in order to read and paint before driving to work. His family abandoned the dining room and ate permanently in the kitchen. On business trips, he slipped away from the usual

social functions to spend hours wandering through art galleries.

In 1958, he astounded his business friends by winning a \$500 prize at the Quebec Concours Artistiques. His work was accepted by juries at the Montreal Spring Exhibition, the Winnipeg Show and the International Exhibition (1959) in Granby. Private buyers across Canada and in the United States and England began to purchase his paintings.



Public relations executive Colin Haworth beside one of his paintings at the opening of his one-man show at the Agnes Lefort Gallery last night.

Staff Photo by Paul Lagace