

## ***Douglas Moerdyke Duncan (1902–1968)***

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Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Douglas M. Duncan was the son of Elizabeth Moerdyke and Smith Frederick Duncan who served as President of the Provincial Paper Mills. Duncan studied at the University of Toronto Schools prior to his admission to the University of Toronto. His primary interests were literature and music according to his biographer and friend Norman J. Endicott, a professor in the English Department at the University of Toronto. Shortly after graduation, Duncan received support from his family to spend a year in Paris.

After travelling to France in 1925, Duncan spent a great deal of time studying European art and architecture. Having admired the work of a Canadian bookbinder, he began training to develop the necessary skills for specializing in the fine binding of book publications. In 1928, upon returning to Toronto, Duncan opened a studio to provide a bookbinding service which became recognized for quality and craftsmanship. His work was selected for exhibition. Duncan maintained this practice for several years before becoming a member of the founding committee of the Picture Loan Society in 1936 which exhibited, sold or served as a lender to clients promoting the works of unrepresented contemporary Canadian artists. Many of the artists were not being displayed in any galleries at the time. Eventually, Duncan assumed the role of director of the organization as well as becoming a major collector of contemporary Canadian artists' works.

As a collector, he would sometimes purchase art directly from an artist. However, his collection was largely developed through purchases of works from exhibitions at the Picture Loan Society. This approach was a demonstration not only of Douglas Duncan's belief in the art but also a gesture of support for the artists.

One of the artists who received Duncan's support was David Milne. Having initially viewed Milne's work in an exhibit at a Toronto commercial gallery in 1935, Duncan later travelled to Six Mile Lake to meet the artist who was painting at his cabin. This visit marked the beginning of a long-term friendship and business arrangement. By 1938, Duncan became the exclusive representative of Milne's work.

In his role as Milne's business representative, Duncan was involved in discussions with the artist in terms of evaluating works and offering advice and encouragement to the artist to retain certain pieces for further assessment rather than destroying them. Milne was a severe critic of his own work and destroyed hundreds of his own artworks over the years. Duncan's interest in Milne's overall career production led to his acquisition of the artist's early works in addition to continued purchases from the artist's ongoing production. Milne's final year of art production was 1952. By 1953, the artist, due to ill-health, was incapable of painting prior to his death in that year.

During his lifetime, Douglas Duncan was recognized as a major collector of Canadian art. Following Duncan's death in 1968, his sister Frances Duncan Barwick arranged for the allocation of thousands of works to collections at Canadian institutions including the Art Gallery of Windsor. In addition, Duncan's efforts to encourage other collectors to acquire Milne's art resulted in subsequent donations to this gallery's collection from other donors.