

Shortly after the publication of our History Book in 2008, Bill Vallevand, who had done a wonderful job formatting this work, received a welcome call from a friend who had just read the book. This friend reported that his ancestors were great friends of the artist Thomas Fripp and that he had inherited several Fripp paintings which he'd gladly loan for our Centennial exhibition at Maltwood.



Thomas William Fripp was indeed a notable member of our Club and had cast a long shadow over the BC art scene in the early part of the twentieth century. He was born in London, England, in 1864 into a family of artists steeped in the romanticism of the British watercolour tradition. His grandfather, Nicholas Pocock, had founded the Royal Watercolour Society. Fripp studied at St. John's Wood Art School, continued his art studies in Italy and then attended the Royal Academy School in London from 1883 to 1890 under the guidance of his father.

He immigrated to British Columbia in 1893 and pursued life as a homesteader until 1904, when he moved to Vancouver to return to watercolour painting on a permanent basis. Initially, unable to make a living from art and as a keen photographer, he took work at local photographic studios to put food on the family table.

However, his passion for art undaunted and concerned at the lack of a focal point for artists in the region, he founded, along with others, including John Kyle and Emily Carr, the BC Society of Fine Arts, and served as its first president. By this time, he was arguably the leading painter in BC, and as his work was popular, he was one of the first artists able to make a living from the sales of his pictures. He routinely exhibited with the BCSFA for the rest of his working life. Additionally, Fripp served on the executive of the BC Art League, created to fund an art school in Vancouver, a goal that would be reached in 1925.



Fripp was one of the first European artists to make a permanent home here, becoming fascinated with the formidable scale of the rugged Canadian terrain and spending many summers with sketchbook and camera in the mountain passes and on the glaciers. Although he is rated as a traditionalist in the field of landscape art, he did make some minor attempt to adjust his style to do justice to his new surroundings but fell well short of the innovative approaches later achieved by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr.



In fact, it's true to say that over his thirty-year career his style remained basically unchanged, as he adhered faithfully to his earlier academic training. By the 1920s, modernism in art, in the form of post-impressionism, was making inroads, and to his credit, Fripp, in his role as a leader in the cultural life of BC and a promoter of art, was scrupulously fair in allowing modernism, like any other art movement, to take root.

He was able to re-connect with Kyle, Carr and other British trained artists following the formation of the Island Arts and Crafts Society in 1909 and was a regular exhibitor at its annual shows between 1912 and 1930. In 1927 one of his works was purchased by Randolph Bruce, Lieutenant-Governor of BC.

As an artist, Fripp is best remembered for his impeccably realistic watercolors depicting the Rockies and landscapes of the Pacific coast, but he also painted in oils and produced portraits. His work is held in private and public collections including the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Fripp remained active in the local arts scene until his death in Vancouver in 1931. To recognize his championship of BC art, funds were raised to commission a bronze bust of him, which now rests in the permanent collection of Vancouver Art Gallery.

*~John Lover*