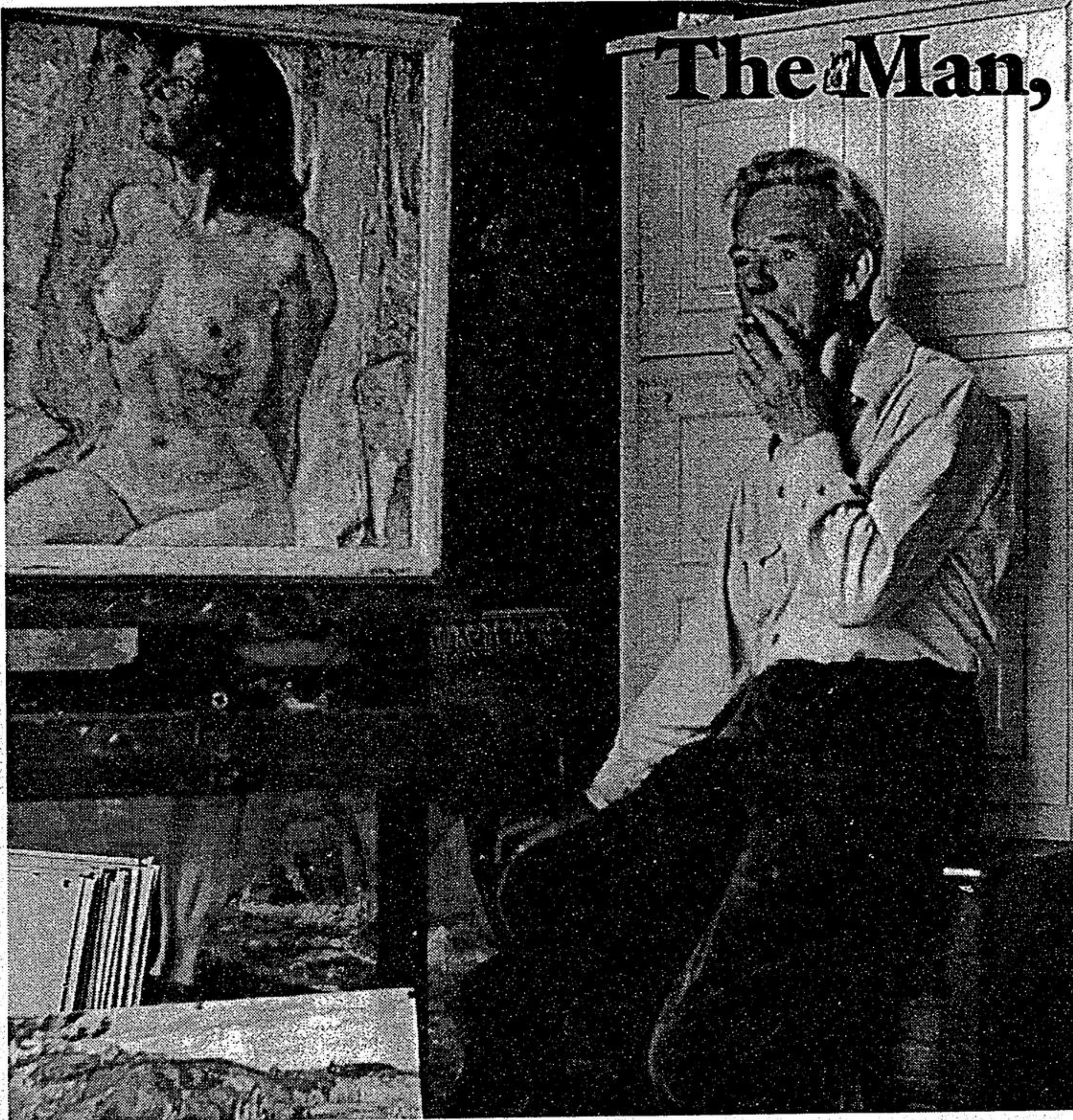


VARLEY



Varley in the studio, Doon Summer School of Fine Arts, 1949.

## The Man, The Legend

Bohemian, chronicler, visionary, rascal:  
Frederick Varley was a Canadian icon.  
His work remains as the legacy  
of his genius.

bolistic color theory influenced by Buddhist spiritual values. The years that followed, 1936-1944 were riddled with depression and illness as Varley drifted between Ottawa and Montreal before returning to Toronto to continue his bohemian existence.

In 1952, Varley met Kathleen Gormley McKay and her husband Donald. For the next 17 years, a close relationship formed between them resulting in their moving into Kathleen's historic Unionville home, the present site of the Kathleen Gormley McKay Art Centre.

Varley died there in 1969 at the age of 88.

Accolades came to Varley late in life. Finally, in the mid-'50s, the artist achieved celebrity status through respect from critics and public admiration.

A nationally-touring retrospective exhibition and other awards of merit at last brought Varley's work to the attention of widespread audiences and established him as one of Canada's most important living artists.

*Varley: A Celebration*, opens as the first exhibition at The Frederick Horsman Varley Art Gallery of Markham. This tribute to the creative spirit of the artist bearing the gallery's name extols the talents of a hero of Canadian culture.



Self-Portrait, Days of 1943  
(detail)

"Varley is bigger now than he was (when he left the Group of Seven), he is of today, and not yesterday, and no local opportunity to see his work has ever given the public such an adequate notion of the man's size...it would be silly to waste space on Varley as part of the past history of the Canadian art movement. He is making more important history now."

~ Pearl McCarthy, *The Globe and Mail*,  
4 November 1944

**"V**arley was a mystic. He was a roisterer and a bohemian. He was a different sort; he marched to a different drummer."

~ William Withrow, former  
Director of the Art Gallery  
of Ontario  
and current member,  
Gallery Advisory Board

Frederick Varley is often referred to as Canada's greatest portrait artist, and one of our most lyrically expressive landscape painters. Fascinated with the human form, he had the unique ability to capture the inner human experience, whether in a portrait, a facial study or a figure in the landscape. An original member of one of Canada's most important artistic influences, the Group of Seven, Varley developed his own personal interpretation of the Canadian landscape.

A bohemian at heart, Varley led a restless life. His travels to various parts of the country reflected his constant quest for personal fulfillment. Born in Sheffield, England in 1881, the artist received his formal education at the Sheffield School of Art and at Antwerp's Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts. After graduation, he worked in London as a magazine and newspaper illustrator prior to emigrating to Canada in 1912, a move inspired by the enthusiasm of his childhood friend, Arthur Lismer.

In Toronto, Varley was employed as a commercial illustrator, first at Grip Ltd. with J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer and Tom Thomson, and later at Rous & Mann Ltd. until 1918. During this time, the artist's work immortalized landscapes that were to become synonymous with the Group of Seven: the Pre-Cambrian shield country of Algonquin Park and

windswept coast of Georgian Bay on Lake Huron.

Commissioned as an honorary captain with the London-based Canadian War Records in 1918, Varley was deeply affected by the carnage and destruction of World War I. His moving canvases remain living testaments to the human suffering he witnessed and the futility of war.

Following the war, Varley abandoned his career as a commercial artist. In 1920, he exhibited his work for the first time at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) with the newly-formed Group of Seven. Following a full-time appointment at the Ontario College of Art, Varley took his inspiration from the mountainscapes of Vancouver where he both taught and painted between 1926 and 1936. During a highly prolific period in British Columbia, Varley formulated and applied his sym-

**'He  
marched to  
a different  
drummer'**

~ William  
Withrow

