



MICHAEL
FORSTER

1. *Burnished Fields, 1983 (front cover)*

acrylic on board

58.4 x 78.7 cms 23 x 31 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed on reverse
atelier no. 199





MICHAEL FORSTER

1907 – 2002

the return to England:

abstracts and landscapes from 1975 onwards



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Foreword

AS A COMPANY, Messum's have a reputation for promoting West Country artists. These have included the plein-air and British Impressionist painters of Newlyn and St Ives who, working around the turn of the last century, were captivated by the changing light and natural beauty of the Cornish peninsular. But we have also taken an interest in artists working in the area much more recently. John Miller was one such, a more inward-looking artist, whose series of 'Interior Landscapes' were produced following the death of his mother.

As a result of the exploratory spirit and the innovatory research undertaken by the firm, in the late 1980s Messum's published the first major survey of British Impressionism to that date. One of the congratulatory phone calls we received was from the well-known Canadian author and art-critic Paul Duval, who had also, in his books on Canadian Impressionism, called into question whether Impressionism as a movement could be tied to any one national school. The endorsement made our efforts seem worthwhile and was the beginning of a lasting relationship with Paul that came to the fore once again following the death of his lifelong friend, Michael Forster, in 2002, when he approached us with the prospect of taking on the estate.

Along with Forster's widow, Gloria, and her daughter Alex Ochitwa, Paul had collated, examined and catalogued the paintings left in Forster's studio at the time of his death in 2002—comprising over a quarter-century's uninterrupted artistic output. Paul was the obvious choice to write Forster's biography when we put together the first catalogue of work from the studio estate in 2007 and we are pleased to be able to reprint that essay at the end of this volume. Convinced of Forster's pioneer status with regard to Canadian painting, Duval has also subsequently collaborated with the Loch Galleries, Toronto, in their show, *Michael Forster: The First Canadian Modernist*.

It is therefore with great pleasure that we present this impressive collection of thirty hitherto unseen works from the studio estate of Michael Forster. They represent some of the finest abstracts and landscapes Forster produced in the years immediately following his return to England from Canada in 1975. Settling in West Cornwall, his main artistic concern was the transference of the experience of light and the patterns of nature into instinctive abstract forms. In these works, produced relatively late in the Forster's life, one still has the sense of an artist at his playful best; an artist who was still experimenting, turning heads as he turned corners, and breaking new ground well into his eighties.

DM

2. **Tree in Bloom, 1976**

acrylic on paper

46 x 62 cms 18 x 24 ins

monogrammed and dated lower left; signed, dated and inscribed verso

atelier no. 222



MICHAEL FORSTER

the return to England:

abstracts and landscapes from 1975 onwards

THE GREAT MAJORITY of the present selection of work drawn from the studio estate of Michael Forster dates from the decade or so immediately following the artist's return to England, after an absence of more than forty years. The move followed the loss of the artist's first wife, Adele, and his arrival on these shores must in itself have awoken memories of the previous occasion on which he had arrived in England in the most difficult of emotional circumstances. As Forster's friend, the Canadian art critic Paul Duval, elaborates in the artist's biography reprinted at the end of this volume, Forster was a man who carried locked within him for the majority of his life a startling secret and an immense store of pain. In his early childhood in India, Michael's mother and her Anglo-Indian lover had conspired together to murder his father, since divorce was impossible under the Raj. Shipped off to boarding school back in England and sworn to secrecy, the trauma suffered by Forster undoubtedly later manifested itself in the agitated energy of so much of his art.

Forster's sister Daphne wrote in her novel, *The Pool of Narcissus*, "People who are born and spend much of their childhood in another country are like secret refugees. In dreams they go back. They carry around a private baggage of pictures no one else can see". Forster certainly kept on traveling even after he settled in Cornwall. In the realm of the unconscious, he revisited the colours and heat of India, and it is difficult not to trace particularly in paintings like *King and Queen* (no. 4), *Chief and Consort* (no. 20) and *Synchronicity* (no. 22) echoes of the ritualistic expression he had admired while living in Mexico.

In an interview given by Michael Forster in the early-1970s to his friend, Paul Duval, he spoke of the polarities within his work:

Today I am most drawn... and here is that two-way pull again... to prehistoric painting with its ritual expression, its mythic symbolism and the vigorous drawing of its palimpsests. From that I turn to the mathematical disciplines of Islamic art. There is always in me that tug between instinct and cultivation... But more than anything I am moved by natural forms and their attendant colours. I love the worn look of weathered wood; of scabby, peeling, painted walls; the patterns of wind and tide; the erosion of knosps and angles; all that is gnarled and impacted by the gestures of history; all that is thumbled and hollowed and smoothed by the succession of years... all, in fact, that time and chance have worked upon. Such things touch me deeply and I would dearly love

*to catch a glimmering of their ambiance in my work.*¹

The "two-way pull" spoken of by Forster was experienced on a regular basis. Large scale abstracts, with vivid colours and paint applied with the sort of intensity and repetition of shape and pattern that he admired in prehistoric and Mexican art and culture, were produced alongside and at the same time as his more muted and delicate landscapes, seething with the keenly felt rhythms and energies of nature as he discovered it on the Cornish peninsular on his arrival in 1975. The tension Forster experienced—between nature and culture, to put it at its most broad, or between his love for the natural world and his lifetime adherence to surrealist practices designed to liberate the unconscious mind, to be a little more specific—was not uncommon among artists whose work one nonetheless thinks of as being predominantly abstract. As Duval has recently pointed out in this regard, even Piet Mondrian, when not painting the grids and blocks of primary colour with which we chiefly associate him, frequently painted trees and flowers as a way of returning to nature and revivifying the hand and eye.

It is, however, supremely difficult to relate Forster's painterly style very closely to that of any particular 'ism', national school, or influential individual. During the course of an eventful life that took him the length and breadth of the western world, Forster personally came into contact with a great diversity of influential and well-known artists. In London, he briefly met Graham Sutherland, also commissioned as a war artist at the time. During the eleven or so years he spent in Mexico he knew Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo and in Canada he was an early supporter of Jean-Paul Riopelle and the *Automatistes*. Forster's pioneer status with regard to Modernism in Canada has recently been celebrated in an exhibition at the Loch Galleries in Toronto.²

If any one encounter can ever be the key to understanding an artist and his work, however, with Forster one might hazard that it was his attendance at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto of 1938. The exhibition was an annual event that had that year largely been taken over by Surrealist painters. It was a rare and exciting opportunity for the public of a genteel Toronto to view the work and engage with the ideas being pursued by the international avant-garde, including such well-known figures as Picasso and Dali.

In the immediate aftermath of the show, the rich jewel-like

3. Time and Place, 1981

acrylic on board

58.4 x 78.7 cms 23 x 31 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed on reverse

atelier no. 185

surfaces, attenuated forms and accelerated perspectives of the works produced by Michael Forster as a result of his period as a war artist, are witness to his assimilation of Surrealism in terms of its aesthetics.³ But at its core, Surrealism was as much a philosophical and literary movement as it was an artistic one. It affected Forster also at a more profound level, providing him with something one could characterize almost in terms of a personal ethic. In his foreword to the 1938 Canadian National Exhibition, Herbert Read wrote:

*Art, to be fully effective, must take into account not only the experience of our waking sensations and reasoning minds, but also the experience of our unconscious life, the world of fantasy and irrationality which intervenes when the control of consciousness is withdrawn... by realizing this vision of reality, the very quality of life will be changed: the anxieties which are the unconscious cause of our personal and communal misery will disappear and the new dimensions of creative activity will transform and enlighten the world.*⁴

In Surrealism, Forster perhaps found a way of harnessing and putting to creative use the tensions he had suppressed within himself for so long. In the interview with Duval, he said "I try to work in a state of open, receptive mindlessness; to be alert to every hint, every direction that reveals itself in the course of the work... It is fed by all that one is, by one's instincts and knowledge, by one's needs and loves; by all, in fact, that goes to make the individual discrete man".

Occasionally the darkness did overwhelm him, however. One such occasion was in 1974, on the loss of his first wife, Adele, to cancer. In the present selection of paintings, *Leaping Man* (no. 5) best reflects the despair of this period. What is remarkable, however, given Forster's personal history, is the immense positivity and beauty of the great majority of his paintings, generated, as they were, out of such turbulent emotions.

Despite the popular perception of Surrealism as emphasizing the unconscious life of the subject to the exclusion of all else, there is within Herbert Read's formulation of the movement an echo of that "two-way pull" spoken of by Forster to his friend, Paul Duval. Read argued that art must pay attention to the observation of the world around us, but in conjunction with an awareness of all the unconscious and irrational feelings that one may bring to the activity. For Forster, it was between these two poles—of sensory observation and of inner vision—that he felt himself constantly to be pulled. But the tension was a creative one, and for Forster the production of his landscapes and his abstract works went hand-in-hand. There is no 'progression' from the one to the other, of the sort that is so often constructed by

modernist art historians in the oeuvre of particular artists. As Paul Duval has recently pointed out,

*For Forster, landscapes represented a means of rekindling his creative energy, and the variety and rhythmic strength of his compositions from nature eloquently mirror this. Forster's landscapes offer a clue to the evolution of his abstracts. The relaxed outdoor environment offered him an opportunity to test his eye against natural form, loosen his technique and generally refresh his vision before returning to the studio for more considered contemplation of his canvases.*⁵

As far as Forster was concerned, there was as much fertile terrain for exploration within as there was without, in the moorland and coastlines of west Cornwall. The reciprocity of the abstract works with the landscapes is brought further into focus in other statements by the artist, such as "...the only place left to explore is the inner landscape".

The fact that Forster was so attuned to his own subjectivity in the production of his paintings in some way contributes to the way in which the viewer is subsequently enabled to open up in front of the works. Forster's second wife, Gloria, has recently written:

Many years of living with, looking at and absorbing his (Forster's) paintings gives one the ability to recognize the unique Forster—the use of space, corners never neglected, amazing colour, control of shading, balance, weight of strokes all contribute to the Forster stamp. Like learning a new language, his paintings require attention as well as an open mind for a new experience. Rather than "what was he thinking?", perhaps "what am I feeling?" is a better way to explore these works of art.

*As the man, so the memory of the paintings linger unexpectedly. People who met him only once have told me of retaining the memory. Owners of his paintings tend to keep and cherish them.*⁶

Dr Jane Hamilton

¹ This interview given by Forster to his friend Paul Duval took place in the early 1970s and its transcript was published by the artist as his artist's statement. It was also published in full in *Michael Forster: An Inner Landscape*, Lord's Wood: Studio Publications, 2007. Extracts from this interview are interspersed throughout the essay and the rest of the catalogue.

² See Paul Duval in *Michael Forster: The First Canadian Modernist*, Toronto: Loch Galleries, 2009

³ The majority of these works are now held as a part of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, at the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

⁴ Herbert Read, 'Surrealist Art': Foreword to the Surrealist section of the catalogue of the *Canadian National Exhibition*, 1938, p. 49

⁵ Paul Duval, 2009, op. cit., pp. 8-9

⁶ Gloria Forster, communication with the author, August 2009.



4. King and Queen, 1976

watercolour and mixed media on paper

43.2 x 58.4 cms 17 x 23 ins

monogrammed lower left, dated lower right; inscribed on reverse

atelier no. 358

"Colour is the medium of his expression. As there have been artists, at times great artists, who reduce all that is visible to line, so he has reduced all that to colour, a strange and visionary world of colour. By means of colour, he knows how to give form to a whole scale of emotions and feelings."

Paul Westheim,

German Art Historian

Catalogue Foreword of Forster's one-man show, Mexico City, 1960



5. **Leaping Man, 1976**

watercolour and mixed media on paper

43.2 x 30.5 cms 17 x 12 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed and inscribed on reverse

atelier no. 357

6. **Girl with Necklace, 1977** (*opposite*)

watercolour and mixed media on paper

43.2 x 58.4 cms 17 x 23 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed and inscribed on reverse

atelier no. 363





7. **Tropic Landscape, 1979**

acrylic on canvas

71.1 x 91.4 cms 28 x 36 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed and dated on reverse

atelier no. 524

*"I dive into colour as I dive into a tropic sea.
I rejoice in colour. How can we live without it?"*

Michael Forster



8. **Two Figures Surprising a Head, 1975**

watercolour and mixed media on paper

35.6 x 48.3 cms 14 x 19 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed and inscribed on reverse

atelier no. 353



9. **Illuminated Garden, 1978**

acrylic on canvas

96.5 x 137.2 cms 38 x 54 ins

signed and dated on reverse; title inscribed on label

atelier no. 539

Exhibited:

Newlyn Art Gallery: *Brewhouse Open* 1986

"I try to work in a state of open, receptive mindlessness: to be alert to every hint, every direction that reveals itself in the course of the work. The painting grows like a plant. That is to say it does its own growing. It is fed by all that one is, by one's instincts and knowledge, one's needs and dreams and loves; by all, in fact, that goes to make the individual discrete man."

Michael Forster



10. **Minerva, 1976**

watercolour and mixed media on paper

58.4 x 43.2 cms 23 x 17 ins

monogrammed and dated lower left; signed and inscribed on reverse
atelier no. 361

11. **Skull, 1976** (*opposite*)

watercolour and mixed media on paper

43.2 x 58.4 cms 17 x 23 ins

monogrammed and dated lower left; signed and inscribed on reverse
atelier no. 362





12. **Landscape, West Cornwall, 1984**

acrylic on board

58 x 81 cms 23 x 32 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed verso

atelier no. 209

"In Cornwall, Forster continued his lifetime practice of painting landscape. For him, landscapes represented a means of rekindling his creative energy, and the variety and rhythmic strength of his compositions from nature eloquently mirror this."

Paul Duval



13. **Moorland Torrent, 1981**

acrylic on board

59.7 x 78.7 cms 23½ x 31 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed on reverse

atelier no. 174



14. **Landscape, 1978**

acrylic on board

54.6 x 72.4 cms 21½ x 28½ ins

monogrammed and dated lower left; signed on reverse

atelier no. 149

"Forster's landscapes offer a clue to the evolution of his abstracts. The relaxed outdoor environment offered him an opportunity to test his eye against natural form, loosen his technique and generally refresh his vision."

Paul Duval



15. Moorland Copse, 1980

acrylic on board

56 x 66 cms 22 x 26 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed on reverse

atelier no. 159



16. **Cauldron of Sky, 1979**

acrylic on canvas

71 x 91 cms 28 x 36 ins

monogrammed and dated lower left

atelier no. 1011

"More than anything I am moved by natural forms and their attendant colours. I love the worn look of weathered wood; of scabby, peeling, painted walls; the patterns of wind and tide; the erosion of knosps and angles; all that is gnarled and impacted by the gestures of history; all that is thumbbed and hollowed and smoothed by the succession of years... all, in fact, that time and chance have worked upon. Such things touch me deeply and I would dearly love to catch a glimmering of their ambiance in my work."

Michael Forster



17. **Bountiful, 1999**

acrylic on canvas

86.4 x 109.2 cms 34 x 43 ins

inscribed with monogram and dated verso

atelier no. 965



18. **Light's Repose, 1985**

acrylic on canvas

63 x 81 cms 25 x 32 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right

atelier no. 062

"There are not too many painters I can recall whose work has endured with me for any length of time. The cubists of course. What painter of my generation has escaped them? And, behind them, old uncle Cézanne. Turner with his luminous mists, and Piero della Francesca; Corot and Ben Nicholson. An odd conjunction that simply goes to point out my own polarities."

Michael Forster



19. **Cornucopia, 1988**

acrylic on canvas

91.4 x 111.8 cms 36 x 44 ins

inscribed with monogram and dated verso

atelier no. 653



20. Chief and Consort, 1979

acrylic on canvas

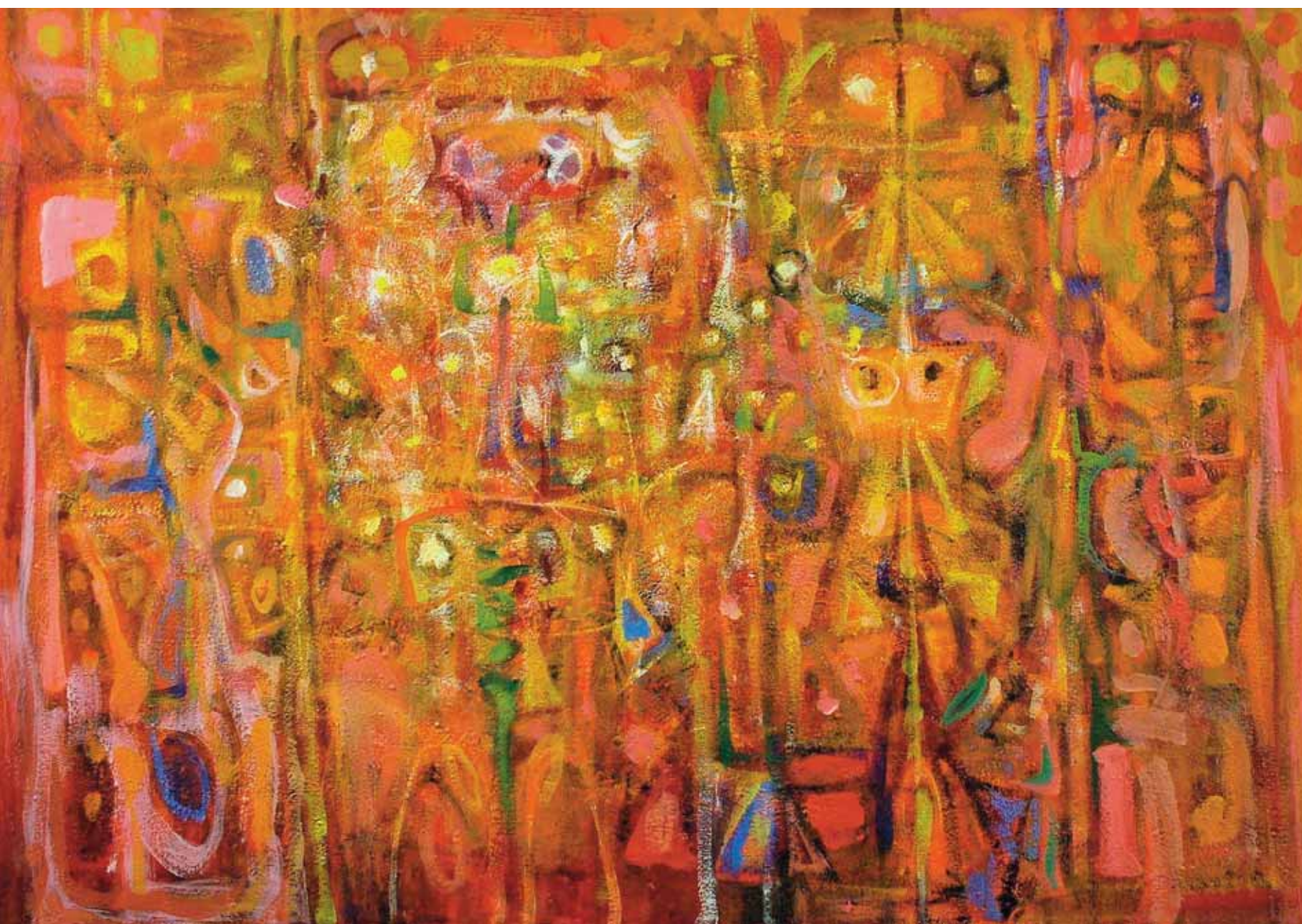
96.5 x 137.2 cms 38 x 54 ins

signed and dated on reverse; title inscribed on label

atelier no. 540

*"Today I am most drawn... to pre-historic painting with
its ritual expression, its mythic symbolism and the vigorous
drawing of its palimpsests."*

Michael Forster



21. **Totem, 1980**

acrylic on canvas

112 x 91 cms 44 x 36 ins

signed and dated on reverse

atelier no. 546



22. **Synchronicity, 1979**

acrylic on canvas

121.9 x 152.4 cms 48 x 60 ins

signed on reverse

atelier no. 529

"As far back as I can remember, drawing or painting has been a compulsive occupation with me. Often good sense has said I should be doing something else, or indeed I would prefer to be idle, but I cannot leave painting alone. It is as though I were afflicted with a lifelong tic. And yet it is a gratifying twitch that sharpens to moments of ecstasy."

Michael Forster



23. **Once More with Feeling, 1985**

acrylic on canvas

71 x 91 cms 28 x 36 ins

monogrammed and dated on reverse

atelier no. 555

24. **Sidereal Chant, 1991** (*opposite*)

acrylic on canvas

90 x 137 cms 35 x 54 ins

monogrammed and dated on reverse; title inscribed on label

atelier no. 731





25. **St Levan, 1979-83**

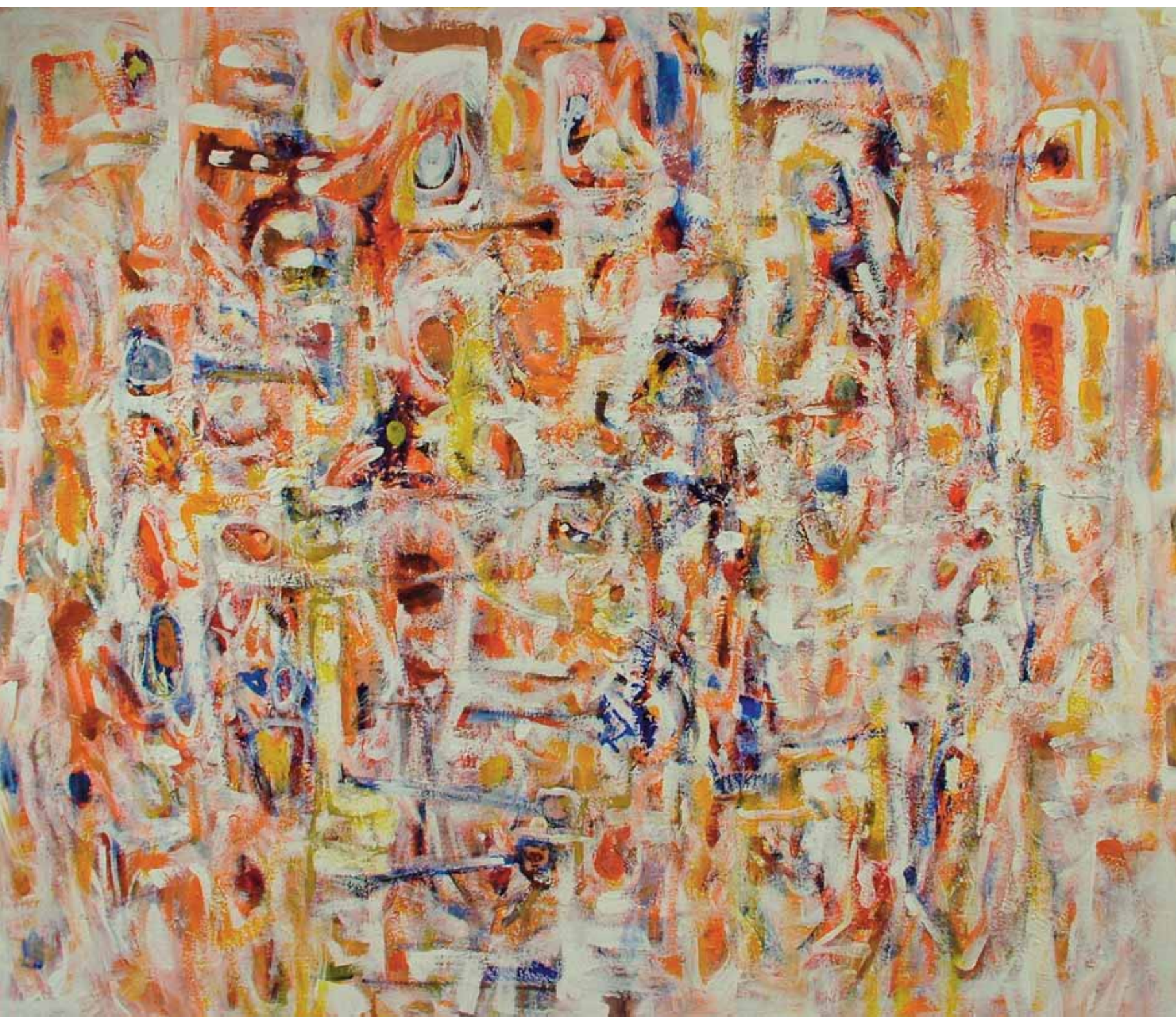
acrylic on canvas
106.7 x 127 cms 42 x 50 ins
signed and dated on reverse
atelier no. 537

Exhibited:

Liverpool: *John Moores Liverpool Exhibition 14*, 1984

"Painting in this sense is a way of life, it reflects the everlasting change and flow. A work is constantly being built up, destroyed, re-invigorated and worn down until all of its tensions arrive at a point of equilibrium. What you see is what is left. And what is left is as much a revelation to me as it is to anybody else."

Michael Forster



26. **Moorland Splendour, 1977**

acrylic on paper

49.5 x 75 cms 19½ x 29½ ins

monogrammed and dated lower left; signed on reverse

atelier no. 242



27. **Equilibrium, 1979**

acrylic on canvas

96.5 x 137.2 cms 38 x 54 ins

signed and dated on reverse

atelier no. 527

"It requires effort to see how simple is the painter's art. He has no dependence upon language. He is not a story teller, his picture needs no crutch of words. His is an expression that includes all feelings, all experiencing. He works neither from memory nor from passion that has cooled but simultaneously with the actual experience."

Michael Forster



28. **Landscape with Rising Sun, 1976**

acrylic on paper

35.6 x 48.3 cms 14 x 19 ins

monogrammed and dated lower right; signed and inscribed on reverse

atelier no. 229

"Having first acknowledged the substance of the materials that are put together to make a painting, after that let all the rest come in. Indeed you can't keep them out. A mist will accumulate about the work, an invisible yet very real coruscation of ideas, memories, imaginings."

Michael Forster



29. **Meteor Shower, 1977**

acrylic on paper
45.7 x 61 cms 18 x 24 ins
monogrammed and dated lower right; signed on reverse
atelier no. 268

30. **First Form, 1979** (opposite)

acrylic on canvas
91.4 x 111.8 cms 36 x 41 ins
signed, dated and inscribed on reverse
atelier no. 532

"These resulting canvases of interstellar phenomenon included some of the most evocative twentieth-century paintings. For most of his long career, Michael took inspiration from the glowing patterns and chromatic depths of interstellar space. In this, Forster is virtually unique among painters."

Paul Duval





The Life and Work of MICHAEL FORSTER

by Paul Duval *

THIS EXHIBITION celebrates the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Michael Forster, one of England's most significant twentieth-century painters. Forster spent much of his long career in isolation, away from the centres of aesthetic fashion, creating a body of work that establishes him as an original and evocative interpreter of English landscape. In the tradition of Cotman, Palmer and Turner, Forster abstracted the essence of the earth, sea and sky with a fresh vision. Through his concepts of space and radiant colour we are introduced to a fresh way of viewing our universe.

Michael Forster was born in Calcutta, but spent his early childhood in the northern Indian city of Meerut, where his English-born father, Edward, was a senior civil servant of the British Colonial Government. An important trading centre and a major junction for the national railroad, Meerut is located on the vast flatness of the Ganges plain that covers most of Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest province.

The northwest of India is a land of dramatic visual contrasts. The constant sun of summer that scorches the earth is followed by a sudden black velvet curtain that fails to cool the air. Overhead, by day, the skies are in constant change, caused by the winds from the Himalayan Mountains that form the northern border of the province. This was Forster's first experience of the sky patterns that later inspired many of his most memorable canvases.

At home, the world that confronted young Michael each morning presented a dazzling array of sight and sound. The garden of the family bungalow held a fluorescence of native growth, rhododendrons, jasmine, clematis, blue poppies, amarantha and musk rose, interspersed with familiar souvenirs of England, lilac, tulips and delphiniums. It was this garden that provided the inspiration for Forster's glowing series of canvases executed seventy-five years later, *To Celebrate A Childhood*, that included such titles as *Kay Plays in my Garden*. Kay was his older sister Kathleen, who played with Michael every day, watched over by their ayah, their native carer.

When Michael was taken about Meerut by his ayah, they would walk beneath the silk cotton and pink casia trees, which grew beside the almond scented oleander and hibiscus bushes that ornamented the city streets. Peacocks perched on the black limbs of the giant banyan trees that loomed over the market stalls loaded with fruit and the pink and white sweetmeats that Michael relished. Through it all wandered bullocks and goats with the occasional elephant bearing one of the local princes. In this mosaic of light and hue, Forster was being offered his future palette as one of his generation's major colourists long before he ever faced a canvas.

Michael's father was often away for trips to attend provincial courts. His wife, Augusta, who often pined for England, spent much of her time on the social rounds of the local colonial community. White women were not expected to work so, to fill their time, they attended garden parties, teas, charity events, concerts and the local polo grounds. On one of her excursions, Augusta met an Anglo-Indian doctor, Harold Clarke, with whom she began an affair. The two fell in love and considered plans to stay together. Divorce was out of the question under the Raj, especially since one of the couple was part native. They decided their only solution was to murder each of their partners.

Clarke's wife was to be the first victim. He paid three Hindu layabouts 100 rupees to strangle his wife while she slept. Augusta's husband was to be poisoned in a manner to suggest a fatal illness. Their clumsy attempts to do so involved a medley of drugs and injections that included arsenic, digitalis, and atropine as well as ground glass and cholera culture. Somehow, their unsuspecting victim survived the pain for four months, until he finally collapsed and died. Dr. Clarke attributed the death from severe sunstroke and complications.

Unfortunately for the two lovers, Edward's seven year old daughter Kathleen had overheard incriminating discussions between Clarke and her mother at the Forster bungalow while she was thought to be asleep. Her love for her father led her to reveal the truth. The following trail was a *cause célèbre* throughout India and reported around the world. The Indian Times printed each day of the month-long proceedings verbatim. In the end, Clarke was sentenced to be hanged and his paramour given a long sentence in a prison, where she died at the age of thirty-eight, after giving birth to her lover's child. Although the court never referred to it as such, this had been an authentic *crime passionel*. In a final letter to Clarke, Augusta wrote, "Oh God give me the strength to bear this cruel and bitter disappointment and parting after all I have done. It's not my fault, Harry dearie, simply Fate."



Photograph taken by Michael Forster while at school in India

* Reprinted from the 2007 catalogue, *Michael Forster: An Inner Landscape* (Lord's Wood: Studio Publications, 2007)

Fate, meanwhile, was devastating the lives of her offspring. Myrtle, the youngest, was put up for adoption. Kathleen was sent to a succession of aunts. When she grew up to young womanhood, she married a military engineer. Upon learning about her family connection he divorced her. For years the Forster's relatives were shunned. It was impossible to vanish within the closely-knit white community. Eventually Kathleen joined Myrtle and they fled together to England where their older brother Roy had been attending school throughout the family crisis.

Michael was sent to school in Calcutta accompanied by his ayah. When their train arrived at the Capital, his beloved ayah was dismissed and he was placed temporarily with an aunt before being enrolled as a boarder at La Martinière school. La Martinière was one of the foremost educational facilities in India. Founded in 1836, it possessed an international reputation for teaching the classics. Michael was to spend the next seven years attending La Martinière.

Although Forster adjusted well to school routine, his years at La Martinière were the hardest of his life. It was then that he learned the details of his family's tragedy and he felt more abandoned than ever. At bedtime, in his dormitory, the ceiling became a collage of childhood memories. He missed his mother and father. He missed Kate, his constant playmate, and Myrtle. He missed his ayah. He returned to classes carrying a secret he only divulged to his wife, Gloria, during the last years of his life.

Michael was a good student. He also sang in the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral, which featured a great west window by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. He visited the Dara bazaar where he could practise his Hindi with the merchants. He enjoyed his art classes at school and often took a sketchbook with him when he went to the Botanical Gardens or when he took the ferry along the Hoogly River to visit the local zoo. Though he was born in Calcutta, all of its sights and sounds were new to him. By the time he finished his seven years at La Martinière, he had grown fond of the city. When he left India for England to continue his education, he felt he was leaving home.

As he sailed through the Suez Canal bound for Southampton, Michael represented one of those who his sister, Kathleen, described in her novel, *The Pool of the Narcissus*, "People who are born and spend much of their childhood in another country are like secret refugees. In dreams they go back. They carry around a private baggage of pictures no one else can see."

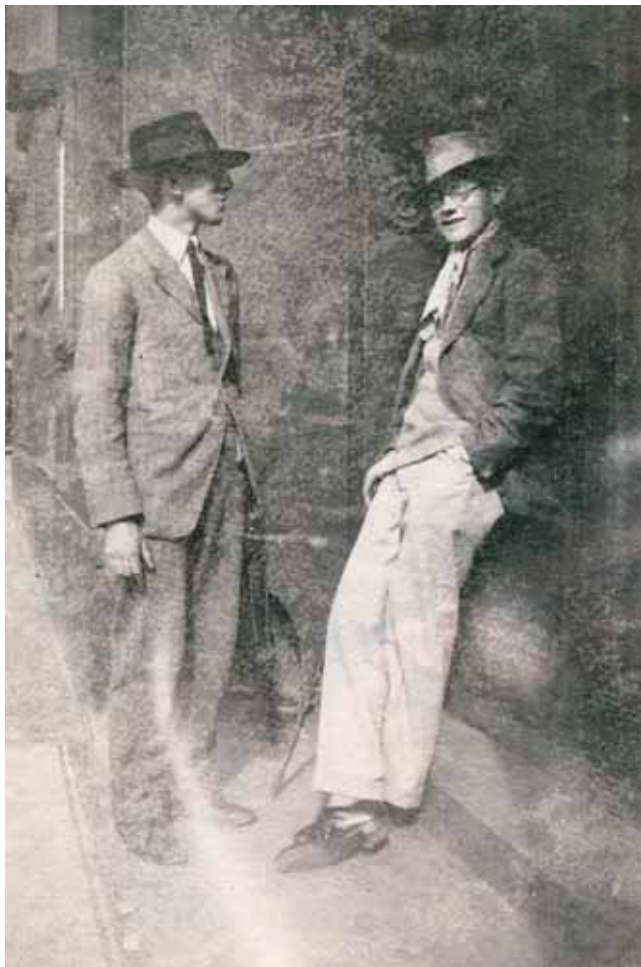
Michael's three-year stay as a boarder at Lancing College in Sussex was to be his last academic sojourn. Like La Martinière, Lancing had a long history, having been founded in 1836, and also shared the same importance as an architectural landmark. Having spent seven years studying the classics in Calcutta, Forster felt at home with Lancing's emphasis on Greek and Latin. He was so comfortable with Latin that he still spoke it fluently when he was ninety. Michael's new home presented many a contrast from India. He missed the prevailing sunshine, the colourful costumes, the exotic foliage as well as the abundance and variety of fruits and vegetables that he had previously known.

While at Lancing, Michael's guardian was Sir Alexander Patterson, a close friend of his late father. Sir Alexander was a prominent officer of the Ministry of Labour. For periods of time Michael stayed in London at Patterson's home, allowing him to visit the city's great galleries. Already fond of sketching, these visits encouraged his desire to become an artist. His time painting out of doors became intense. Although he executed watercolours of the Sussex landscape nearby the school, his favourite subject was Brighton. The train ride to Brighton was a short one. There he would paint Constable's favourite stretch of shoreline. He also drew figures in the Pavilion as well as in the aquarium.

In the summer of 1924, Michael left Lancing to enrol at London's Central School of Art to realize his ambition to become a painter. His enthusiasm to do so had grown each time he stayed with Sir Alexander Patterson in London. His time spent in the rich collections of the city had introduced him to the masterpieces of the past. Now he was about to enter a world where art demanded more than appreciation. It represented hard manual work, a knowledge of materials and a test of talent.

The Central School of Art was a no-nonsense place to learn the practice of painting. It had originally been formed by the London County Council to provide teaching for workers in craft industries, and it continued that tradition of basic skills. Apart from his art training, the school provided Michael with his first opportunity to be truly independent, away from a decade of the constant discipline of boarding schools. A more loosely structured social atmosphere prevailing in the studios allowed him to expand relationships. He accumulated a number of close friends, sometimes on a deeper emotional level. The years spent at the London School of Art provided a pivotal role for Forster's future life. At the Central School, Forster was fortunate to encounter an ideal pairing of teachers – William Roberts and Bernard Meninsky. The extroverted Roberts had been a member of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist movement. Roberts' canvases combined a hard-edged, neo-cubist style with a palette of contrasting primary colours. His themes were from everyday life. From Roberts, Forster inherited a strictly controlled manner of spatial design with which he continued to experiment in a series of still-lives during the early nineteen-thirties.

Bernard Meninsky was a member of a remarkable generation of Anglo-Jewish painters who included Max Gertler, David Bomberg and Jacob Kramer.



Art student days in Paris, 1927; Forster on right

Meninsky was a neo-classic artist of subtly coloured and gently contoured figure compositions. These usually modest-sized works seemed often suffused by an air of melancholy. Forster was immediately drawn to Meninsky as both a teacher and a painter. Whether this resulted from a perception by Michael that they shared a common inner sorrow cannot be determined, but it is suggested by Meninsky's early suicide. As late as 1937, Forster painted a pair of murals, since destroyed, that contained groups of nudes reminiscent of his favourite teacher.

After leaving The London School of Art, Michael spent several months in Paris attending the Académie Colarossi. He later claimed that the Académie's classes were uninspiring and spent much of his time savouring the glittering pleasures of Paris in the 1920's. Although he did little work, he remembered his first stay in the French capital with fondness. He attended art balls, explored the city's museums, went out on harmless pranks with fellow students, and generally enjoyed himself. One of his lasting memories was attending a concert by Josephine Baker, the cover girl of Art Deco Paris. One cannot help wondering how Forster's painting would have emerged if he had chosen to remain in France for a lengthy period. Instead, he opted to cross the Atlantic to Canada, perhaps on a quest to satisfy his longing for the home the family tragedy had denied him.

Forster also hoped that in the summer of 1928 the Depression would be less bitter than in England, where employment was virtually impossible. However upon his arrival in Toronto, he found an identical predicament and was obliged to travel west to the prairies where he worked for a month on a farm as a harvester. On his return to Toronto, Michael was hired by a succession of engraving houses to provide commercial art, which left him little time to pursue his own painting. This all changed dramatically in the late thirties when he found employment with a dominant retail outlet, the T. Eaton Company.

For their new flagship store, Eaton's had created a special display department headed by René Cera (1895-1992), a young French architect and interior designer from Marseilles. When Cera assumed management of the department, he established it as an informal, free-wheeling studio which enabled gifted painters to do their own thing. A short, dynamic, independent individual, Cera interviewed applicants for his project to find artists to paint mural-sized backgrounds for the store's many display windows. Forster was one of those selected. It turned out to be a revelation for him. He was permitted not only to express himself as a painter, but to do so on a large scale. Cera only required that he be shown a small sketch of the proposed design. He placed almost no restrictions on theme, including nudes. Cera also provided the very best materials and allowed his paid protégés to take home whatever paints and brushes they had left over after finishing their project. Each commission was paid for separately, so Michael and his colleagues had the opportunity, and the money, to do some of their own painting.

For those involved in Cera's workshop, it must have appeared as a miracle that all of this could happen in the middle of the Depression. Unfortunately, due to costs, after each painting had completed its stay within a window, it was covered over with a fresh coat of white paint so that the panel could be reused. In that way, many remarkable achievements disappeared. None of the artists had the foresight to photograph their work.

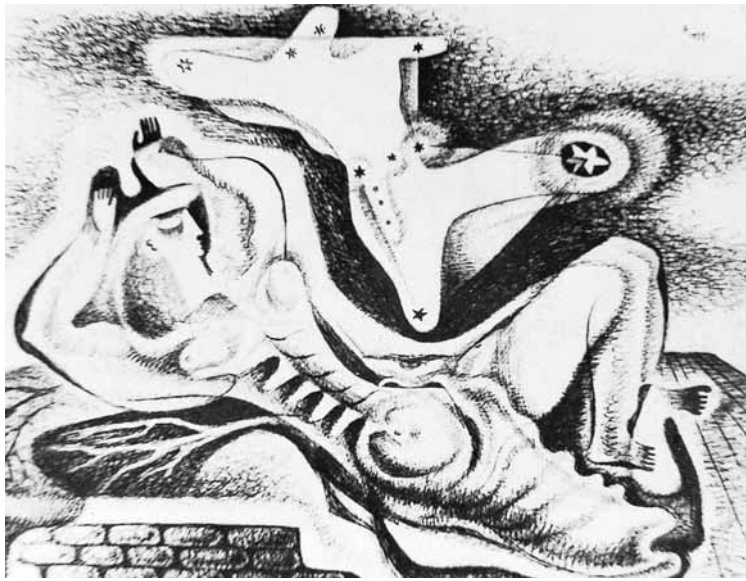
Coincidental to René Cera's *atelier*, a second fortuitous occurrence took place for Forster, with a more immediate impact. In 1938, a major exhibition of Surrealist art collected together by Herbert Read and Roland Penrose took place in Toronto. It included such iconic works as Salvador Dali's *Autumn Cannibalism* and Pablo Picasso's *Weeping Woman*. *Weeping Woman* was priced at \$2,200. Luckily for Penrose and the Tate Gallery, it failed to sell. Among the others included in the show were Joan Miró, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Paul Klee, André Masson, Paul Delvaux and Hans Arp. British artists included were Henry Moore, Paul Nash and Edward Burra. The exhibition caused a sensational, mostly negative reaction among Toronto visitors who were not persuaded by Herbert Read's foreword to the catalogue which stated, "These works of art are not to afford, nor likely to be received as objects of beauty. The old aesthetics is dead. Here are the lineaments of a new vein of gold."

At least one visitor, Michael Forster, did receive the exhibits as "objects of beauty". His reaction was immediate and, in a country where Surrealism was almost unknown and no artist practised it, he decided to explore the movement. Between 1939 and 1945, Forster produced a number of significant surrealist-related compositions, including a large group of evocative drawings. Forster put a very personal stamp upon the surrealist agenda. He invented a different attenuated figuration for the bodies within his compelling, mostly darkling compositions. His figures are not rigid or contained, they appear about to shift or almost dissipate. Among these works, such pieces as *Arctic Encounter* (1939), *Resurgence* (1941) and *The Bride* (1944) deserve a place in the international mainstream of surrealism.

In June 1944, Forster was commissioned as an official war artist with the rank of Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Navy. He was initially employed in Atlantic submarine patrols on a corvette. Later, he was based in London in a boarding house near the Albert Bridge, where one of his fellow boarders was the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas. The two of them would



Aboard the SS Colbourne, 1943 (Forster in middle)



Untitled 5, pen and ink, 1939 (Location unknown)



Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes, blue and black ink, 1940
(Location unknown)

occasionally go out on the town. While in England, one of Forster's commissions was to record corvette port activities at Felixstowe. He later left for France, where he discovered an irresistible subject, the bombed-out remains of German submarine pens at Brest. They represented a perfect merger of history and pictorial theme. The very gutted interior, its textures, strewn machinery and twisted girders all invited him as a painter. From them Forster elicited his most moving souvenirs of war, somehow suggesting a human presence still lurking within the remaining debris. The pen's destruction was a physical equivalent of the psychic devastation that Michael had suffered in his early years. The colours that occur in the Brest paintings are the mauves, greens and pale yellows of a faded wreath. What part of Forster's secret emotions were melded into his pictures at Brest is impossible to ascertain. Certainly, they were the most haunting paintings Michael had executed to that time.

Following his discharge in 1946, Michael returned to Canada to complete a number of unfinished war paintings. That same year, he married Adele Davis in Ottawa. In 1950, the couple made their way from Ottawa to Montreal where Michael looked forward to meeting members of the *Automatistes*, a revolutionary group of young French Canadian artists who were trying to change the face of a virtually moribund Quebec art scene. For the most part, the *Automatistes* were influenced by André Breton's surrealist manifesto. Among its main participants were Jean-Paul Riopelle and Paul-Emile Borduas. Forster supported the new movement by writing a number of critical articles about it. His own paintings were shown at a two-man exhibition with prominent Quebec artist Edwin Holgate at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In 1952, Forster decided to leave Canada for Mexico, drawn by its cultural renaissance led by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Siqueiros, and the need for a more vital art scene. Michael and Adele settled in San Miguel de Allende where a large community of Canadians and Americans existed, simplifying their new social life. But it was the surrounding land and villages that made Michael feel truly at home. Though he had never previously set foot in Mexico, all of his experiences there became immediately familiar. It represented a poignant recall of his childhood in India. The bazaars, the lush flora, the brightly-dyed dresses, the exotic fruit, the white walls and the ambient pedlars selling their crafts were all part of his past.

Forster's Mexican colleagues were welcoming, in both San Miguel and Mexico City, where he eventually spent much of his time. He developed a close relationship with the noted painter Rufino Tamayo, and with John Huston, who produced a number of films in Mexico. Michael found the country's topography arresting and shared Henry Moore's enthusiasm for its ancient culture, but it was the prevailing light and the sun that most impacted upon him. The tropical sun that he knew from birth became a signature theme for Michael's painting.

For Forster, his years in Mexico were a period of creative change and material experiment. He tried the various new media that were being introduced there – duco,

polymer, pyroxlyn and alkyds. He painted representational, abstract and expressionist canvases. For a time he produced a series of intense landscapes, heavily loaded with pigment and featuring dark red hues that would have been at home beside the strident works by the early German Expressionists.

By 1960, Forster had become one of the best-known painters in Mexico. In May of that year, he was honoured by a large one-man exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno. The show consisted of eighty works, most of them painted in pyroxilin. It was Michael's first recognition as an international artist. The reviews of the exhibition were enthusiastic and the catalogue foreword, by noted art historian Paul Westheim, hailed Forster as a highly original painter and a foremost colourist.

Surprisingly, for unknown reasons, Forster left Mexico for Canada in 1963 at the height of his reputation. However, the advances he had made during his eleven-year Mexican stay accompanied him northward. In the decade following his return to Canada Forster engaged in a continuous exploration of colour. His adoption of the new medium of acrylic allowed him to extend the variety of his paintings' textural surfaces and clarity of colour. It also provided a non-toxic material with quick drying qualities that permitted the immediate layering of pigments to create luminous transparent glazes. The colour turned to darkness when Adele died of cancer in 1974. With her, Michael had shared twenty-eight years of constant sharing and intimacy. Bereaved and alone, he proceeded to produce a series of black paintings, private mirrors of despair, which he eventually destroyed.

Out of the depths of the dark paintings emerged a series of large canvases entitled *Rites of Passage*, which Michael

described as acts of acceptance and reconciliation. Almost textureless, they represented precisely rendered, lyric images of space, executed with countless thin layers of paint to create a sense of lustrous depth.

The exhibition was Forster's most important private gallery show held in Canada. The *Rites of Passage* were a portent of future master-pieces that he was to paint abroad.

After Adele's death, Michael returned to England to be with his sister, Myrtle, who had also recently lost her spouse. Her home in Devon did not provide for an artist's studio so they eventually found an appropriate dwelling in Treen, Cornwall. Forster's arrival in England was essentially a cultural homecoming. Throughout his stay in Canada, he had remained a displaced British painter. There was never any evidence in his work of the bold Canadian landscape tradition that prevailed there. His war art had been totally at variance to the more reportorial work of his colleagues. Only the 1938 exhibition of European Surrealism and the emergence of the young Quebec *Automatistes* were of any aesthetic interest for him.

Treen was to be Forster's home for the rest of his life. A quiet village facing the south shore, it is located in a picturesque area that encapsulates all the elements of greater Cornwall in one small setting. It possesses soaring cliffs, a working fishing hamlet, a famous old pub, meadows, farms, and woods that abound in season with daffodils, bluebells, violets, campions, foxgloves, and hawthorn.

Michael's vast studio on the second floor of his home, Torbracken, was to be his creative lair for more than twenty years. Although there was an easel in the studio, Forster preferred to work standing up at an oversized architect's table that allowed him to tilt his canvases to whatever angle he desired. Nearby were his favourite scrub brushes, acrylic pigments and a variety of painting knives. Michael would ascend the steps of his studio every morning, working throughout the day with only a short break for lunch. Light was provided by large windows facing north and south, one facing the sea, the other overlooking the mosaic of flowers in the garden below.

In Cornwall, Forster's painting came to a momentous fruition. Although he was very aware of space and form, he began to build the architecture of his pictures around colour. As a result, one chromatic surprise after another surfaced in his paintings. It would be difficult to find a more life enhancing experience in painting than that found in Forster's brilliant *oeuvre*.

In his own words, Michael expressed his passion for colour: "I dive into colour as I dive into the tropical sea. I rejoice in colour. How can we live without it? The world is exuberant with it, from the first palest light to final darkness there is no escape from colour. For me, even a good black and white drawing has colour. I am not advocating the blatant and indiscriminate use of the spectrum. It has its tensions equally as form does, though in a manner different from form."

In his catalogue foreword to Forster's show at Mexico City's National Museum of Art, Paul Westheim wrote, "Colour is his medium of expression. As there are and have been artists, at times great artists, who reduce all that is visible to line, so he reduces all that is visible – indeed all that is imaginable – to colour, a strange and fantastic world of visionary colour."

The true signature of a major painter is revealed in the manner that he applies his pigment, his unique gestures that compose the textural surface of his finished painting. Next to colour, texture is the most compelling element in Forster's work. Like Cezanne, he explores his picture space from corner to corner. Melded together with his luminous colour, Forster's instinctive brushwork makes his paintings truly original.

Forster revealed his passion for texture in his statement, "More than anything, I am moved by natural forms and their attendant colours. I love the warm look of weathered wood: of scabby, peeling walls, the patterns of wind and tide: the erosion of knops and angles, all that is gnarled and impacted with the gesture of history, all that is thumped and hollowed and smoothed by the succession of the years – all, in fact, that time and chance have worked upon. Such things touch me deeply and I would dearly love to catch a glimmer of their ambience in my work."



The Bride, 1944 (Private collection)

John Constable would have appreciated Forster's ode to the beauty of commonplace textures when he wrote, "There is nothing ugly; I never saw an ugly thing in my life; for let the form of an object be as it may – light, shade and perspective will always make it beautiful."

As early as 1939, Forster was exploring the outer universe long before the first landing on the moon. During the Second World War, as a naval war artist, Forster spent many months at sea, surrounded only by water and sky. This deepened his awareness of the ever-changing pictorial pageant of the constellations that he could view unimpeded above his ship day and night. He regularly drew notes that provided a nucleus for some of his later peacetime abstractions.

For Michael, the Cornish sky was a bountiful source of inspiration. More than a century earlier, Constable was similarly moved by the sky by day, and recorded it in a large number of small, brilliant oil sketches, but he rarely painted it by night. For Michael, the night sky presented a gleaming palette. He studied the galaxies, the constellations, clusters and comets that coursed across the face of darkness above his home, and later, transferred them in his studio into some of his most compelling compositions.

By day, Forster studied the sky from his large studio windows, observing the constantly changing cloud formations scattered over the sea. Occasionally, he would venture out to sketch the relationship between the sky and the cliffs, meadows and farm buildings of his neighbourhood. These often became the nexus of his landscape paintings.

Parallel to the execution of his nature-based abstractions, Forster, from time to time, would resort to landscape painting as a means of rekindling his creative energy and to avoid the trap for so many non-figurative artists – the rote-like repetition of a limited number of shapes and chroma that end with monotony. Michael's activity represented an exercise of some other abstract painters, including Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich. Throughout his career, Mondrian would switch from his abstracts to the rendering of detailed studies of flowers. Forster's own landscapes form a significant part of his *oeuvre*. Full of variety and rhythmic energy, they may be compared to any of his time. The direct power of the acrylic canvasses and the refinement of his watercolours of Cornwall display the range of his formidable talent.

After Michael's sister, Myrtle, died in 1990, Michael invited his former dealer and close friend Gloria Ochitwa to join him at Torbracken. Gloria provided him with the emotional support and security he sought, and many of the sparkling 1990's paintings reflect this. Michael adored Gloria. He would leave affectionate notes around the house for her to find. They were married in 1993.

As a classically trained scholar, Forster wrote fluently about his vocation as these excerpts may reveal:

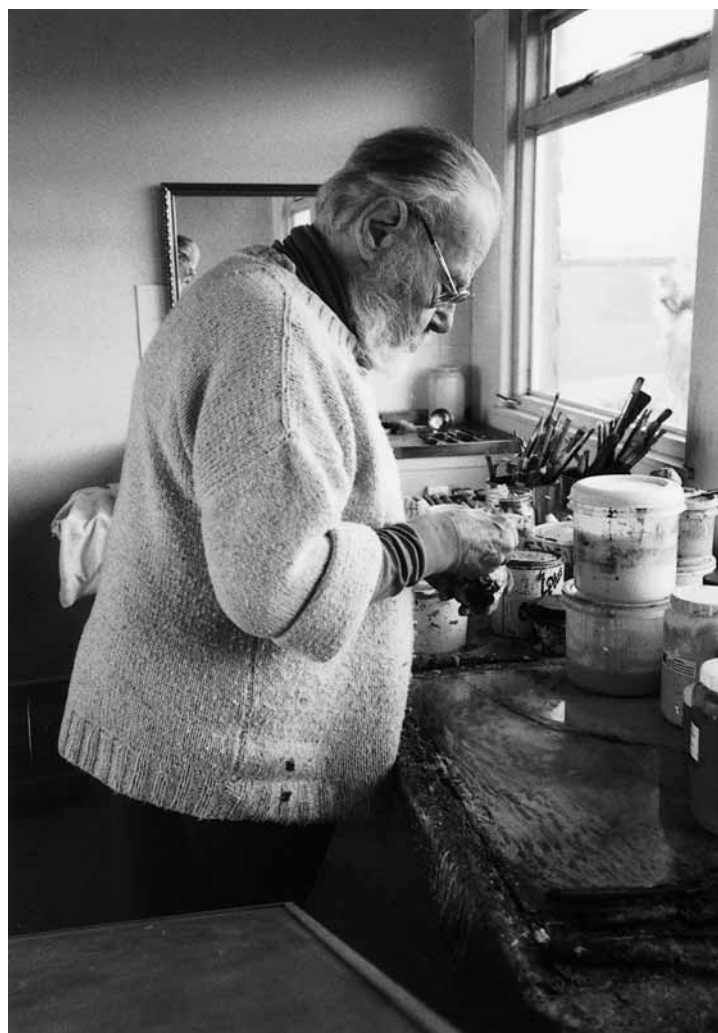
"Among the ways by which a man may speak his heart is painting."

"It requires effort to see how simple is the painter's art. He has no dependence upon language. He is not a story teller, his picture needs no crutch of words. His is an expression that includes all feelings, all experiencing. He works neither from memory nor from passion that has cooled but simultaneously with the actual experience."

"I try to work in a state of open, receptive mindlessness: to be alert to every hint, every direction that reveals itself in the course of the work. The painting grows like a plant. That is to say it does its own growing. It is fed by all that one is, by one's instincts and knowledge, one's needs and dreams and loves: by all, in fact, that goes to make the individual discrete man. Painting in this sense is a way of life, it reflects the everlasting change and flow. A work is constantly being built up, destroyed, re-invigorated and worn down until all of its tensions arrive at a point of equilibrium. What you see is what is left. And what is left is as much a revelation to me as it is to anybody else."

Picasso stated, "I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them." For Forster, one would substitute the word think with sense. Forster was an instinctive painter. Like Turner, he sensed rather than plotted. But Forster was also a consummate professional. His free and highly personal technique emerged from an earlier classic training in disciplined draughtsmanship. In the end he wrote, "The only subject left to explore is the inner landscape of the formless imagination."

Forster's prominent position in modern British painting is only now being fully realized. As further exhibitions afford opportunities to view his work, he will assume his proper place in twentieth-century art.



Forster at work in his studio, 1990

Paul Duval, Critic and Art Historian

Chronology

1907	Francis Michael Forster born May 4 in Calcutta, India, to Edward and Augusta Forster	1944-46	Selected as an official War Artist with the Royal Canadian Navy
1921-24	Attended Lancing College, West Sussex	1945	Became Canadian citizen
1924-27	Enrolled at the London Central School of Arts and Crafts, London	1946	Married Adele Davis
1927	Attended classes at the Académie Colarossi, Paris	1946-48	Lived in the Virgin Islands
1928	Arrived in Toronto	1950-51	Art Critic for <i>The Standard</i> , Montreal
Early 1930s	Employed at Rapid Grip and Brigden Commercial Firms; Worked at T. Eaton Company under René Cera	1952-63	Lived and worked in Mexico
Late 1930s	Lived in Hollywood for approximately 2 years working as a set designer for the movie industry	1960	Solo exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno, Mexico City
1938	Major Surrealist exhibition curated by Herbert Read and Roland Penrose held at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto	1964	Returned to Burlington, Ontario, Canada
1941	First Solo Exhibition, held at the Picture Loan Society, Toronto	1974	Adele Forster dies of cancer
1943	Enlisted to make visual record of activities for the Merchant Marine	1975	Moved to Treen, Cornwall
		1990	Death of Michael's sister, Myrtle
		1993	Married Gloria Ochitwa
		2002	Michael Forster died, at the age of 95.



The Michael Forster Studio Collection

This estate collection represents over a quarter of a century's uninterrupted artistic output by Michael Forster, and comprises the paintings in his studio at the time of his death in 2002. The works of art were collated, examined and catalogued in a process overseen by the renowned author and art-critic Paul Duval together with the artist's wife, Gloria Forster and Alexandra Ochitwa. The acrylics on canvas and mixed media works on paper were listed in an inventory called 'The Michael Forster Studio Collection' and were in many cases categorised as cosmic paintings, landscapes, abstractions, or as forming parts of particular series. At that time works of art were marked with an atelier stamp bearing the conjoined initials 'MF' in a square. Each work carries the corresponding inventory/studio collection number and the atelier stamp that were put there by Gloria Forster, Alexandra Ochitwa and Paul Duval.

The Michael Forster Studio Collection is represented worldwide
by David Messum Fine Art Ltd.

Exhibitions

- 1939 New York World's Fair, *Canadian Art: Canadian Society of Graphic Art*
- 1940 Art Gallery of Ontario, *The seventeenth annual exhibition of the Canadian Society of Graphic Artists*, and at this exhibition in 1941, 1942, 1944, 1945.
- 1941 Picture Loan Society, Toronto, *Paintings and Drawings by Michael Forster*
Art Gallery of Toronto, *The fourteenth annual exhibition of the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour*, and at this exhibition in 1942, 1944, 1946
- 1942 Art Gallery of Toronto, *Canadian Group of Painters*
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *The Canadian Society of Graphic Art Travelling Exhibition*
Phillips Academy, Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Mass., *Aspects of Contemporary Painting in Canada*
Hart House, University of Toronto, *Jack Nichols and Michael Forster*
- 1943 Art Gallery of Ontario, *Four Canadian Artists: Edna Taçon, Jessie Flaunt, Michael Forster, Gordon Webber*
- 1945 Art Gallery of Toronto, Art Association of Montreal, National Gallery of Canada, Le Musée de la Province de Québec, *The Development of Painting in Canada 1665-1945*
The National Gallery of Canada, *Exhibition of Canadian War Art*
- 1946 Biblioteca Publica Municipal, Rio de Janeiro, *Artes Grafica do Canada*
Gallery of Photographic Stores, Ltd., Ottawa, *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Michael Forster*
Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, *Unesco Exhibition of International Art, Canadian Section*
- 1947 The Gallery, 73 Albert Street Ottawa, *Michael Forster*
Eaton's Fine Art Galleries, Toronto, *First Peacetime Exhibition: Official Services Artists*
- 1948 Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (organised by National Gallery of Canada), *Canadian War Art Exhibition*
- 1949 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Forty Years of Canadian Painting from Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven to the present day*
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Fifty Years of Painting in Canada*
- 1950 National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., *Canadian Painting: An Exhibition arranged by the National Gallery of Canada*
- 1951 Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, *Artist Self-Portraits*
Museum of Fine Arts Montreal, *Drawings by 12 Montreal Artists*
Montreal, *Conversation Pieces: Skirts by Michael and Adele Forster*
- 1952 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Paintings and Drawings from the collection of J. S. McLean*
Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, *Louis Muhlstock and Michael Forster*
Museum of Fine Arts Montreal, *Annual Spring Exhibition*
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Canadian Group of Painters*
Picture Loan Society, Toronto, *Paintings by Michael Forster*
- 1953 Sao Paulo, *Il Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo*, (organised by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)
- 1954 Galeria Proteo, Mexico, *Michael Forster*
- 1958 Mexico, *Primera Bienal Interamericana de Pintura y Grabado* (organised by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)
- 1960 Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno, Mexico, *Obras de Michael Forster*
- 1963 Picture Loan Society, Toronto, *Paintings by Michael Forster*
- 1965 Robertson Galleries, Ottawa, *Michael Forster, recent paintings*
Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, *Vincent Price Collection*
- 1966 Mazelow Gallery, Toronto, *Michael Forster Painting Exhibition*
Beckett Gallery, Hamilton, *Michael Forster*
- 1967 Willistead Port Gallery of Windsor, *Some Paintings, Drawings and Prints from the Douglas Duncan Collection*
- 1969 Robertson Galleries, Ottawa, *Paintings by Michael Forster*
- 1970 C. Gutenberg Gallery, Toronto, *Michael Forster: Retrospective Exhibition*
Hemingway Galleries, Jamestown, New York, *Paintings and Drawings by Michael Forster in a Retrospective Exhibit*
- 1971 The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Gift from the Douglas M. Duncan Collection and the Milne-Duncan Bequest*
- 1972 Damkjar-Burton Gallery, Hamilton, *Michael Forster*
- 1973 Gairloch Gallery, Oakville, *An exhibition of abstract paintings from the works of Michael Forster*
Thielson Gallery, London, Ontario, *Michael Forster*
- 1974 Upper Street Gallery, London, *Michael Forster*
Damkjar-Burton Gallery, Hamilton, *Michael Forster*
- 1975 Damkjar-Burton Gallery, Hamilton, *Rites of Passage*
- 1977 Damkjar-Burton Gallery, Hamilton, *Michael Forster, Acrylics on Paper*
- 1979 Penwith Galleries, Cornwall, *Penwith Galleries Associates Exhibition*
Newlyn Society of Artists, Newlyn Orion Galleries, Cornwall, *Associate Exhibition*. (Forster participated in the Spring and Summer exhibitions of the Newlyn Society of Artists until 1986)
Penwith Society of Arts and Penwith Galleries Ltd., Cornwall, *Spring Exhibition*
- 1981 Newlyn Orion Galleries, Cornwall, *Paintings by Michael Forster*
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, *Canadian Artists of the Second World War*
- 1982 Royal Academy of Art, London, *The Two Hundred and Fourteenth Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition*
- 1985 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *The 1940s, A Decade of Paintings in Ontario*
- 1986 Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance, *Newlyn Society of Artists*
- 1993 The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, *Order out of Chaos: Sixty Years of a Canadian Artist*
- 1996 Gallery Gevik, Toronto, *Michael Forster*
- 1998 Gallery Gevik, Toronto, *Michael Forster*
- 2001 Galerie d'Art Déclic, Luxembourg, *Michael Forster*
- 2007 Messum's, Cork Street, London, *An Inner Landscape*
- 2009 Loch Gallery, Toronto, *Michael Forster: The First Canadian Modernist*
- 2009 Messum's, Cork Street, London, *The Return to England: Abstracts and Landscapes from 1975 onwards*



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Forster near Penberth Cove, Cornwall, c. 1990



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