

David Brown Milne (1882-1953)

Born near Burgoyne, Ontario into a family of ten children, David Milne was the youngest. Milne was regarded as an outstanding student during his high school years in Walkerton, Ontario. In addition to his academic strengths, he showed an intense early interest in drawing which manifest itself in a prolific output of sketches and illustrations. Following graduation from secondary school, he remained in Ontario to study to become a teacher. Milne commenced a teaching career while at the same time maintaining his interest in art by taking a correspondence course offered by an American company.

In 1903, he left teaching to travel to New York to undertake studies to become an illustrator. Upon receiving acceptance to attend the Art Students League, Milne was not inspired by the instruction there. More stimulating ideas were presented in the lectures being offered by other American contemporary artists as well as being inspired by visits he made to exhibitions of artists such as Monet and Matisse. These contacts with American and European art helped to shape Milne's approach to challenging artistic traditions by focussing on the formal and Modernist aspects of artmaking.

To earn a living, Milne began to produce posters, signage and advertising cards for small businesses. He shared studio space with another artist Amos Engle who also worked as a commercial illustrator and artist. Milne also began exhibiting in various society exhibitions in New York and other centres. Milne married his first wife Patsy Hegarty in 1912. In 1913, he displayed five works in the Armory Show, a major art exhibition of Modernist art held in New York which resulted in some positive critical and curatorial acknowledgement. In his efforts to derive an income from art, Milne was faced with many challenges in selling his commercial work achieving only limited success.

By 1916, Milne and his wife moved to Boston Corners, a rural village in upstate New York. He put more effort into painting full-time. However, this activity was counter-balanced by having to allocate a percentage of his time every month to making advertising showcards for small businesses as a means of generating a personal income. In 1917, Milne joined the Canadian Army. By 1918, Milne had become an artist in the Canadian War Records program and painted scenes of various locations in England and in Europe related to the military encampments or the aftermath of battle sites.

Upon his return to New York State in late 1919, Milne began painting various sites in the region. During the 1920s, Milne moved to Ottawa in an attempt to build his reputation as an artist in Canada. It was not successful. Milne's final arrival back in Canada came in 1929. Following his return, he travelled and painted in many areas of Ontario: Temagami, Weston, Palgrave, Six Mile Lake, Toronto, Uxbridge and at Baptiste Lake near Bancroft. Milne and his wife separated in the early 1930s.

A major sale of his work to Alice and Vincent Massey in 1934 led to greater exposure for the artist. In 1935, Milne's art came to the attention of art collector Douglas Duncan in 1935 after Duncan had viewed the artist's work in an exhibition in Toronto. Duncan sought out the artist. This contact resulted in a long-term friendship and business relationship between the two men. Duncan eventually became the sole agent for sales of Milne's work.

In the late 1930s, Milne began a relationship with Kathleen Pavey. In 1941, their son David Milne Jr. was born. Milne continued to paint and wrote extensively reflecting on the changes in the development of his artistic practice.

Milne's art production at the time of his death in 1953 included a large number of oils, watercolours as well as a substantial quantity of prints and drawings.