

Enlightenment (the Bechtel Mural)

About Jack Bechtel, O.S.A.

- Born in Kitchener, 1923
- Died 1966
- Served in R.C.A.F. 1942 to 1945
- Studied at Ontario College of Art
- Joined the staff at Doon School of Fine Arts, 1950
- Painted in Mexico 1952
- Assisted R. York Wilson with Imperial Oil Mural, 1957
- Elected to The Ontario Society of Artists, 1961
- One-man shows in Kitchener, London, Brantford, Guelph, Toronto, Galt and Owen Sound
- Paintings in collections of C.N.E., Imperial Oil and many private collections

The Theme

The history of mankind has evolved, if not always progressed, from the darkness of ignorance toward the light of truth. Slowly, man learned to value this light above all else. He invented a way to record and store it, his most precious treasure, not in underground vaults, but in libraries. The songs of his poets, the records and measures of his discoverers, the words of his God, the chronicles of all the progressive illuminations which guided man out of stumbling ignorance are classified alphabetically and by subject in this building. The mural provides an abstract vision of the sequence of man's enlightenment, clarifies it visually, renders a feeling of the swing of this illumination through time.

The light in the mural echoes up and down, radiating outwards. Below, from left to right, can be read man's land-locked struggle to employ the light for his progress. To the left are suggested man's early fumbling efforts to master the light of the fire which warmed his body. The central portion reveals a moment when man's image was magnified by direct communication with the light which fired his soul. To the right can be seen the wondrous, callous, glow of contemporary technology, which now can either light man's path to other worlds, or incinerate his own.

Continued

Certainly the themes, left and right, are related, but the intensities of the fire and the complexities of the man have become infinitely magnified. And now we have the total light, left, centre and right, stored in this library, here to help us choose and control our destiny. Surely man's lights will lead him elsewhere than from the sheltering cave to the fallout shelter. If the viewer will consult the mural using his curiosity and imagination in the same manner he consults the card catalogue, form will take significance before his eyes, and the mural's theme will become his personal experience: truth's light becomes knowledge; Enlightenment.

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