

Art and soul

Re Lamanna: A Belief In Art's Power To Illuminate The Darkness, by John Bentley Mays (May 25):

Some have said that former Canadian art dealer Carmen Lamanna was a man transformed by art. In fact, it was he who sought to transform us. Mr. Lamanna was a highly refined human being who understood the enduring significance of human relationships and of experience. One rankles at suggestions, clearly influenced by social stereotypes, that he was "modestly

educated, (an) otherwise conventional Roman Catholic immigrant," "a woodcarver's son" who spoke "Italian like a peasant," and somehow overcame his background to achieve greatness, according to the prevailing culture's terms.

Although it is true that he inspired personal loyalty and respect for the sanctity of the artist-dealer relationship, his motivations did not extend to "need" or "jealousy" as Mr. Mays would have us believe. Throughout his career, Mr. Lamanna was a fierce proponent of Canadian culture and insisted on holding each of us (including our elected leaders) personally accountable for its development. His original vision is expressed in a seminal 1974 catalogue, *Carmen Lamanna at Owens Art Gallery* (reprinted in *Queen Street Magazine*, Spring/Winter 1976/77). "There is a movement in Canada of such unquestionable innovation and genuine originality that Canada no longer has any need to look to other established art centres for direction or for standards. The genius is still virtually untapped." The fact is that Mr. Lamanna never let go of this vision.

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