

**Silburt, Allan. *A Colourful Life – the Art and Drawing of Josh Silburt*.  
 Refrew, ON: GSPH/General Store Publishing House, 2013.**

*A Colourful Life* is an illustrated biography of Canadian artist Josh Silburt (1914–1991). His son Allan Silburt has painstakingly put together a firsthand biographical account of his father's works dating from the late 1930s and covering almost six decades. Allan Silburt has highlighted the shift in his father's oeuvre, from political cartoons for major Canadian newspapers, to an artistic expression in the mid to late seventies of the Canadian wilderness. Josh Silburt's childhood dream of becoming an artist collided head on with many layers of life in Canada; the economic and political upheavals brought about by the world events of the mid-20th century: the Great Depression, the Second World War, an emerging labour movement, and the Cold War. Silburt struggled to overcome the poverty of his childhood and the old world immigrant ways of his parents while pursuing his dream of becoming a mainstream visual artist. His meager Jewish roots in Winnipeg's North End provoked him to set out in the dirty 30s to make his living with a pen and a brush; first doing freelance portraits, then sports cartoons and finally, political cartoons. His work has appeared in most of the major newspapers across Canada. Ultimately, Josh's left wing political views led to his firing at the start of the Cold War, whereby his career shifted from drawing to painting. His newspaper cartoons are sardonic glimpses into 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada.

Following the path of his early study under L.L. Fitzgerald at the Winnipeg School of Art, Silburt developed his own unique style of palette knife application of vivid oil impasto and later, brushed acrylics, capturing the beauty and ruggedness of Canada's wilderness. Allan Silburt places him in the company of members of the Group of Seven as he was inspired by their work. He further suggests that his father knew his contemporaries; from Montreal, Gita Caiserman–Roth and one of the early Montreal Jewish painters, Harry Mayerovitch. Whereas Josh Silburt's work is heavily based on the landscapes of Ontario, the Montreal artists were producing Montreal urban scenes. The mention of these painters in a discussion of his father's work seems to be an attempt at enhancing his father's artistic stature. However, Josh did achieve a considerable degree of success with numerous one-man shows across Canada. His work has appeared in private and public collections throughout the world. He captured the beauty and ruggedness of Canada, building upon the style and perspective of the Group of Seven.

The book is organized in four sections indicating the breadth of his skill. Two sections are biographical and two are selections from his body of work. The plates have been supplemented with extensive research, noting relevant political events of the time period. We are able to capture a glimpse of the life of a Canadian Jewish leftist artist in the mid-20th century through the numerous plates and sketches. Drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings and artworks are woven together with the narra-

tive to support the scant documentation on Josh Silburt's life. No doubt the author wanted a lasting legacy in this biographical review of his father's life.

*General Store Publishing House* is to be commended in producing a book of Canadian art which contains over 250 illustrations presented in high resolution in a large format. Publishers currently seem to be shying away from this costly type of publication. The placement of negatives of his sketches in the corner pages are a charming touch and serve to enhance the books overall appearance. It seems less like a text and more like a coffee table keepsake.

**Barbara Weiser**