



26 Alexander Colville

PC CC 1920 – 2013

Dog and Bridge

acrylic polymer emulsion on board, signed and on verso titled, dated 1976 and inscribed *Acrylic Polymer Emulsion* 35 ½ x 35 ½ in, 90.2 x 90.2 cm

PROVENANCE

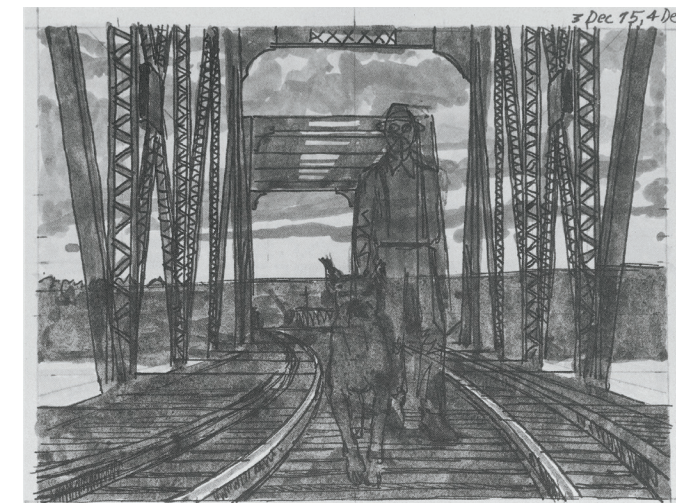
Fischer Fine Art Limited, London
Private Collection, Ontario

LITERATURE

Robert Melville, *Alex Colville*, Marlborough Fine Art (London), 1970, the related drawing *Seeing-Eye Dog, Man and Bridge* reproduced page 36
Helen J. Dow, *The Art of Alex Colville*, 1972, the related drawing *Seeing-Eye Dog, Man and Bridge* reproduced plate 39, page 90
Virgil Hammock, “Alex Colville: La perfection dans le réalisme / Perfection and Reality,” *Vie des arts*, vol. 21, no. 84, Autumn 1976, reproduced page 16
“Modes of Representational Art,” *artscanada* no. 210 / 211, December 1976 – January 1977, reproduced page 37
Alex Colville, *Alex Colville: schilderijen & tekeningen, 1970 – 1977*, Gemeentemuseum, 1977, reproduced unpaginated and front cover
Art Perry, “Increased Drama Shows in Latest Colville Works,” *The Province*, July 30, 1977, reproduced
Marina Vaizey, *Alex Colville: Paintings and Drawings, 1970 – 1977*, Städtische Kunsthalle and Fischer Fine Art Limited, 1977, listed catalogue #15, page 31 and reproduced front cover
David Burnett, *Alex Colville*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983, mentioned pages 140, 207, 208, reproduced page 209, catalogue raisonné #107, and the related drawing *Study for Dog and Bridge* reproduced page 210
Colville: *Beings in Time*, W.K.P. Kennedy Gallery, 1992, reproduced inside front cover, listed, unpaginated
Tom Smart, *Alex Colville: Return*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2003, reproduced page 67

EXHIBITED

Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, *Alex Colville: schilderijen & tekeningen, 1970 – 1977*, March 5 – April 10, 1977, traveling in 1977 to Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf and Fischer Fine Art Limited, London, catalogue #15
Galerie Royale, Vancouver, *Alex Colville*, July – August 13, 1977
Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto and Montreal, *Alex Colville*, 1978
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Alex Colville, A Retrospective*, July 22 – September 18, 1983, traveling in 1983 – 1984 to Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Berlin; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; and Vancouver Art Gallery, catalogue #cr.107.ex.46
W.K.P. Kennedy Gallery, Ontario, *Colville: Beings in Time*, October 23 – November 28, 1992, catalogue #7



ALEX COLVILLE

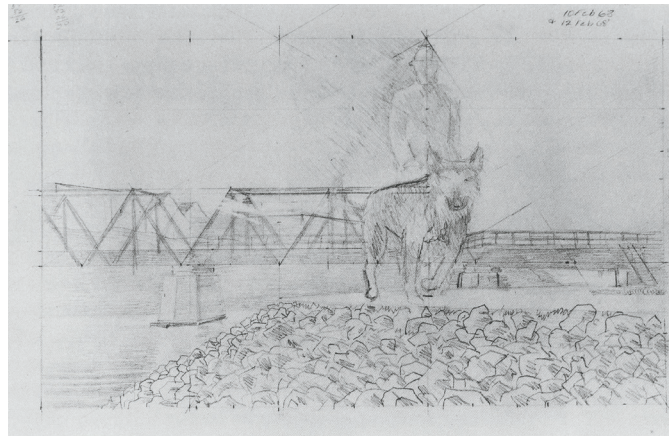
Study for Dog and Bridge

pencil, ink and wash on paper, December 3 – 4, 1975
10 ¾ x 12 ½ in, 27.2 x 31.3 cm
Private Collection
Courtesy of A.C. Fine Art Inc.

Not for sale with this lot

THREE OF ALEX COLVILLE’S abiding passions collaborate to make *Dog and Bridge* an exceptionally affecting and memorable painting. His understanding and love of animals, particularly canines, is clear. He boldly sets the lithe, active dog seen here against the technological marvel of a massive, double-span bridge, painted again with commitment and an engineer’s understanding. The dog’s warm eyes meet our gaze and form a bond. Even though no human is literally shown here, Colville thus moves to a philosophical plane, perhaps his favourite level of engagement. His painting might spark us to ask what our relationship is with animals who “see” but do not understand the world as we do. Do we control and employ them, as we do our technologies of transportation and communication?

The drawing *Seeing-Eye Dog, Man and Bridge* and its preparatory study (both 1968) were made nearly a decade before the large painting *Dog and Bridge* (1976). This chronology tells us important things about the later image. First, Colville had been ruminating on this theme and site for all this time. It is the same bridge, the same dog. Yet the drawings were not literally preparatory studies for the painting but rather parts of Colville’s characteristically long, and in all senses measured, thinking



ALEX COLVILLE
Study for Seeing-Eye Dog and Man
 pencil on paper, February 10 – 12, 1968
 7 ¼ x 11 in, 18.4 x 27.9 cm
 Private Collection
 Courtesy of A.C. Fine Art Inc.

Not for sale with this lot



ALEX COLVILLE
Seeing-Eye Dog, Man and Bridge
 ink and acrylic on paper, 1968
 6 x 10 ½ in, 15.2 x 26.7 cm
 Private Collection
 Courtesy of A.C. Fine Art Inc.

Not for sale with this lot

process. Colville rejected his early formulation of the scene, changing its components, and thus its meanings, radically by 1976. The man is removed; we instead see a close-up of both dog and bridge.

Virgil Hammock interviewed Colville shortly after *Dog and Bridge* was completed. He reports that “the original plan... was to have a blind man and a dog crossing the bridge,” a rather risky undertaking, we might imagine. “The image with the man was, in Colville’s mind, ‘too corny,’”¹ the artist said, by which he likely meant “too obvious.” Human contact is more subtly suggested in *Dog and Bridge*: our vantage point is low, though not quite at the dog’s eye level. The animal looks slightly up, as if waiting for a command from someone bending over. Yes, a blind person may depend on a seeing-eye dog as a technology, but for Colville, this would be only one of many possible relationships to explore visually. In the 1976 painting, he does not limit our options in this way.

To appreciate the subtle profundity of *Dog and Bridge*, we might well compare the two elements in its title with Colville’s many other works that separately include dogs and bridges, keeping in mind that here he combines his thinking to produce what is ultimately a meditation on the animate and inanimate. Colville’s close attention to bridges appears during his time as a war artist in Europe during World War II. A prime example is his oil painting *The Nijmegen Bridge, Holland*, 1946, in the Canadian War Museum, for which there are also many studies. He wrote

in a notebook from 1944, “I was unable to work because of rain, but was fascinated by the possibilities of the bridge, river and wrecked town.”² Here the strategically crucial structure dwarfs its military traffic and the activities of soldiers.

Colville’s fascination with bridges continued in several works from his home area in the Maritimes. Hammock reports from his interview with Colville that for *Dog and Bridge*, the artist was typically methodical in measuring the elements of this complex structure and adjusting them to attain the dramatic scene we see. The essentials of the prospect are lavishly available to us, but we construct their meanings. Similarly, in *Traveller*, 1992, a winter scene in which we adopt a driver’s viewpoint approaching a bridge and slowing down for a hitchhiker, Colville leaves it to the viewer to decide whether the driver stops or not and whether the subsequent crossing of the bridge is significant, symbolic, or merely quotidian for either traveller.

Colville’s attention to animals is as well-known as it is extensive. Crucially—as in *Dog and Bridge*—he investigates both their separateness and independent integrity and their varied relationships with humans. He pictures wild animals (especially birds), domesticated livestock, and of course pets. He depicts hunting dogs self-absorbed in following a scent (*Hound in Field*, 1958), or, more frequently throughout his long career, as integral to our lives (*Child and Dog*, 1952; *Dog in Car*, 1999). In his masterly double portrait *Dog and Priest*, painted just two years after *Dog and Bridge*, Colville again waxes philosophical by overlapping one of

the dog’s eyes with that of the priest. Both figures are black, both wear collars, and both see, but in different ways. Colville has also shown himself in intimate connection with his own canine pets, notably in *Dog and Groom*, 1991, where he is brushing his dog, and—significantly for our understanding of *Dog and Bridge* as essentially a domestic, benign encounter—in a photograph showing Colville with a similar-looking dog walking along a railway track near Wolfville, Nova Scotia.³ A more elaborate setting that includes an animal and the Colville family is the formal portrait of the Colvilles taken by photographer Guido Mangold in 1977. Here we see Alex and Rhoda Colville in the right foreground; behind them hangs Colville’s imposing painting *My Father with His Dog* of 1968. Not coincidentally, this photograph was taken only a year after *Dog and Bridge*; Colville’s image of his father and dog was done in 1968, the same year as *Seeing-Eye Dog, Man and Bridge*.

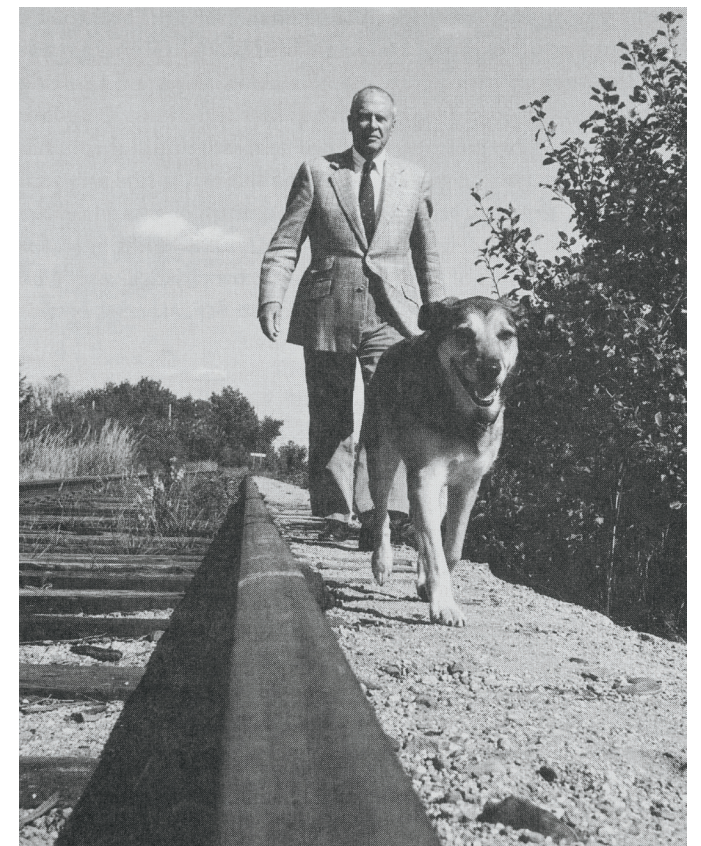
For decades before his death at age 92 in 2013, Colville was famous. He embraced the role of public figure: he was forthcoming about his own work and readily expressed views on topics from politics to philosophy. *Dog and Bridge* is direct in this way: it tells us much. But also like its author, the painting is not always what it seems to be. It remains productively open to our interpretations and pleasingly enigmatic. One can readily understand why *Dog and Bridge* is one of Colville’s most widely exhibited and written about works, and in turn, why Colville remains a much-celebrated artist in Canada.

We thank Mark Cheetham, Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto and author of *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed*, for contributing the above essay.

1. Virgil Hammock, “Alex Colville: La perfection dans le réalisme / Alex Colville: Perfection and Reality,” *Vie des Arts*, 21, no. 84, (automne 1976) 88, <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/54972ac>.
2. Alex Colville, quoted in “Painting, the Nijmegen Bridge, Holland,” Canadian War Museum, <https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1016611/>.
3. Reproduced in Mark A. Cheetham, *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed*, (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994) page 128.

This work is in the original frame made by Colville. With the frame, this work measures 41 ¾ x 41 ¾ inches. Regarding his frames, Colville wrote in a letter dated August 9, 1982, “I am touched by your concern for the frames, partly because if they are strong (which they are) they protect the paintings... As you know, my frames are all double; there is a big outer frame and a smaller inner frame. This is so that a piece of glass may be inserted between the two frames to protect the painting while travelling, or in public exhibition.” Colville goes on to describe that his paintings were framed under a new kind of glass which was very strong, and almost invisible.

ESTIMATE: \$800,000 – 1,200,000



TOP: *Dog and Bridge* in the frame made by Colville

BOTTOM: Alex Colville with his dog Min, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, 1991
 Photo: Unknown