

James W. Strutt and Louis Archambault at the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal

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In the fall of 1960, the Department of Transport's bi-monthly newsletter honouring the completion of the new Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal proudly proclaimed, "New jet-age airports already opened or soon to be inaugurated stretch from Halifax to Victoria!"¹ With the introduction of the passenger jet in the 1950s and increasing technology in the Jet Age, the air terminal building became an emblem for the late phase of modernity.² The triumphal proclamation in the D.O.T's 1960 newsletter speaks to the nationwide airport building campaign that had begun in 1952 and would continue until 1968.³ As part of the second wave of international airport construction, and prompted by the privatization of airlines in 1952,⁴ the Canadian Government and D.O.T undertook a building campaign to overhaul the air terminal infrastructure nationwide. In addition to responding to overcrowded and outdated facilities, the building campaign projected a new cosmopolitan international presence, and aimed to ensure Canada's role as "a full partner in the Jet Age."⁵ The airport building campaign also served as an experiment in the social engineering of national identity, as the new air terminals began to disseminate a vision of a unified Canadian culture through art and architecture in what would come to be "the largest public art project ever realized" in the country.⁶

¹ "The Shape Of Flight", *News on the DOT: Department of Transport Staff Publication* (1960): 4.

² Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe, "Grounding The New Perspectives Of Modernism: Canadian Airports And The Reconfiguration Of The Cultural And Political Territory", *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 28, no. 12 (2003): 3.

³ Bernard Flaman, "When "La Dolce Vita" Met "True Canadianism": Canadian Airports In The Sixties", in *Made In Canada: Craft And Design In The Sixties*, Alan C Elder, Design Exchange and Canadian Museum of Civilization ed., 1st ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 17.

⁴ Windsor-Liscombe, "Grounding The New Perspectives Of Modernism", 8.

⁵ "The Shape Of Flight", *News on the DOT*, 5.

⁶ Bernard Flaman, "The Airport As City Square", *Backlash* 20, no. 3 (2003): 5.

Though much has been written about the air terminals in Toronto, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, which were completed in 1964 and seen as the culmination of the D.O.T's nationwide construction campaign,⁷ there has been little discussion of the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal opened in June of 1960. While smaller than the airports in Toronto, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal was one of the first commissions under the D.O.T's new airport campaign. Not only did the air terminal in Ottawa represent an important piece of Canada's aerodrome infrastructure by providing a connection to the nation's capital, it also served as one of the first air terminal buildings to include the integration of art and architecture that would become integral to the D.O.T's public art mission. Moreover, the building, designed by Gilleland & Strutt Architects, provides an interesting study of James W. Strutt's personal architectural goals and Strutt's own interest in the integration of art and architecture.

"Replacing a shed-like station smaller than many private homes in Ottawa's better residential sections",⁸ the necessity to upgrade the airport in Ottawa was of pressing concern as the D.O.T embarked on their airport building campaign, conferring preference on the country's international terminals. Airports, bastions of new cosmopolitan modernity, had the potential to establish the country on an international stage, and as Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe notes, the Jet Age would eventually "reposition Canada centrally in the late modern globalized "network of places."⁹ Seen as the "gateway to the capital,"¹⁰ the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal was commissioned in 1955, as one of the D.O.T's first airport projects along with Newfoundland's Gander Air Terminal.¹¹ The design for the project was awarded to the local Ottawa firm of Gilleland & Strutt Architects, helmed by Bill Gilleland and James W. Strutt.

James W. Strutt was born in Pembroke, Ontario in 1924 and educated at the University of Toronto's School of Architecture. After graduating, Strutt returned to Ottawa, and partnered with his

⁷ Flaman, "The Airport As City Square", 5.

⁸ "The Shape Of Flight", *News on the DOT*, 4.

⁹ Windsor-Liscombe, "Grounding The New Perspectives Of Modernism", 5.

¹⁰ "The Shape Of Flight", *News on the DOT*, 4.

¹¹ W. T McGrath, *A History Of Canadian Airports*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lugus, 1991), 110.

mentor William Gilleland in 1951 to form the partnership of Gilleland & Strutt.¹² Interested in modernism, Strutt's style was largely influenced by Buckminster Fuller's weight efficiencies and space age forms, Frank Lloyd Wright's interest in organic architecture and geometry, and Eduardo Catalano's experimentation with hypars and the hyperbolic paraboloid roof.¹³ Strutt experimented with hyperbolic paraboloid roofs, non-orthogonal geometric form, and environmental integration throughout his career, and in 1956 he completed the first hyperbolic paraboloid roof in Canada at his own home in the Gatineau Hills.¹⁴ Lauded for "fostering the modernist age in Canadian architecture,"¹⁵ Strutt had already completed a number of both public and private commissions in Ottawa before receiving the commission for the Uplands Air Terminal in 1955. A burgeoning figure in Canadian modernism, Strutt himself also had aeronautical experience as both a pilot and architect, having flown as an RCAF pilot during WWII, and already having designing the regional airport in Sept-Isles, Quebec in 1954.¹⁶ Strutt would also go on to receive the commission for the Halifax International Airport in 1957.¹⁷

Having received the commission from the D.O.T, Gilleland & Strutt prepared preliminary working drawings for the Uplands Air Terminal. Strutt's personal design philosophy and interest in non-orthogonal form is immediately made evident in the early sketches, perhaps most notably in the undulating hyperbolic paraboloid roof above the D.O.T's operational area in front of the main entrance. A second hyperbolic paraboloid roof feature is included on the airport's main terminal building, above the central waiting room and adjoining the control tower.¹⁸ The two curved roofs

¹² Brian Hierlihy and Titania Truesdale, "Strutt House", in *Heritage & Technology Heritage Conservation Symposium* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2013), 1.

¹³ Titania Truesdale, "'Praxis Of Inquiry' In Architectural Design", in *Design And Nature II*, M.W Collins and C.A Brebbiaed. , 1st ed. (London: WIT Press, 2004), 581.

¹⁴ Titania Truesdale, "The Strutt House: A Modern Marvel Of Geometry And Materiality", *Heritage* 8, no. 2 (2010): 6.

¹⁵ Noreen Shanahan, "Ottawa Architect Championed Modernist Age In Canadian Design", *The Globe And Mail*, 2017, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/incoming/ottawa-architect-championed-modernist-age-in-canadian-design/article17977189/?service=print>.

¹⁶ McGrath, *A History Of Canadian Airports*, 214.

¹⁷ J.W. Strutt, "Three International Airports", *Journal RAIC* 37, no. 12 (1960): 509.

¹⁸ Gilleland & Strutt Architects, "Uplands Air Terminal, Ottawa Ontario", Preliminary Sketch. (Ottawa, March 1955.), James W. Strutt Fonds. Library and Archives Canada.

provide a visual and compositional link between the D.O.T's operational area, the main terminal building, and the height of the control tower, unifying the central elements of the airport. Strutt's early sketches also include calculations for the curved roof that consider the visual impact of the hyperbolic paraboloid roof from eye-level at the balcony.¹⁹ With the inclusion of these undulating features in the early Uplands Air Terminal sketches, it is made clear that Strutt's interest in hyperbolic paraboloid roofs represented his own exploration into weight efficiencies and environmental integration in what would become a personal 'lifelong inquiry.'²⁰

Though the hyperbolic paraboloid roofs feature prominently in Strutt's early sketches and preliminary drawings, they are later replaced by flat roofs. In subsequent drawings, a flat roof covers the hexagonal D.O.T building near the front entrance, and the undulating roof over the main waiting room disappears.²¹ This horizontality is consistent with the rest of the linear design, which also features flat terraces and spectator decks.

The inclusion of spectator decks, sunken gardens, and terraces speaks to the nature of the airport as a new type of public and cultural space. Drawing on Deyan Sudjic and Pico Iyer's reading of airports as new public spaces of the global village, Bernard Flaman notes Canadian airports came to represent new types of public space.²²

Not only was the interior of the air terminal a new public space, the design of the entire Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal indicates it was conceived of as a new cultural destination. With the inclusion of facilities such as a permanent aircraft museum, exhibition spaces, a restaurant open to the public with a sundeck for potential 'summer meals served outside', and a spectator deck to provide "the non-flying public with front-row seats to the endless drama of flight and arrival,"²³ the airport was envisioned as more than a hub for travel. In addition to drawing considerable revenue for the D.O.T,

¹⁹ Gilleland & Strutt Architects, "Uplands Air Terminal, Ottawa Ontario", Drawing. (Ottawa, n.d.), James W. Strutt Fonds. Library and Archives Canada.

²⁰ Truesdale, "'Praxis Of Inquiry' In Architectural Design", 581.

²¹ Gilleland & Strutt Architects, "Uplands Air Terminal, Ottawa Ontario", Drawing, (Ottawa, n.d.), James W. Strutt Fonds. Library and Archives Canada.

²² Flaman, "When "La Dolce Vita" Met "True Canadianism", 18.

²³ Harry Bruce, "New Uplands Has Everything", *The Ottawa Journal*, 1959.

as Strutt wryly notes, the new facilities at the Uplands Air Terminal made the airport building a terminus in its own right, for travelers and “sight-seers” alike.²⁴

Though Strutt’s original drawings display his proclivity for non-orthogonal form and experimentation with hyperbolic paraboloids, subsequent sketches show a more strictly linear international style building. Working with W.A Ramsay, Chief Architect for the D.O.T’s Air Services Branch, the building’s design shifts to a more international style.²⁵ Steel framed with an aluminum curtain wall, the building’s updated design adopted a more linear form with larger windows and more glass, and an increased inclusion of landscape elements such as sunken terraces and reflecting pools. The simplified and functional geometric design described as “monotonous and diffused,” was consistent with what has been described as the defining architectural characteristic of mid-century Canadian airport building: “a cautious internationalism, vectored toward the United States consumerist and mechanistic re-appropriation of the Modern Movement.”²⁶

The final iteration of the building as a linear one level scheme was described as “a giant spread arrow”.²⁷ Departing passengers were served in the west wing, while incoming passengers were served in the east wing with Health, Immigration, and Customs facilities.²⁸ The centre of the terminal in the “tip of the arrow” featured the main lobby and waiting area. The airy open lobby was situated below a circular second floor gallery space and featured sixteen feet high windows of tinted grey glass, while the south facing windows in the restaurant provided uninhibited views of the runway.²⁹

Anita Aarons points to the difficult nature of commissioned work, which always ‘provides an interesting contrast of effort and result’.³⁰ Corralled by federal patrons, it is likely that Strutt’s original design was toned down to fit the standardized design profile the Government sought, and the final

²⁴ Strutt, "Three International Airports", 510.

²⁵ Gilleland & Strutt, "Uplands Air Terminal, Ottawa Ontario".

²⁶ Windsor-Liscombe, "Grounding The New Perspectives Of Modernism", 9.

²⁷ Bruce, "New Uplands Has Everything".

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ministère des Transports, *Ottawa Aerogare* (Ottawa: L'Imprimeur de la Reine, Contrôleur de la Papeterie, 1960).

³⁰ Anita Aarons, "The Dual Nature Of Commissioned Work", *Journal RAIC* 42, no. 2 (1965): 13.

iteration of the Uplands Air Terminal led Strutt to later proclaim it was the “most anonymous building [I have] ever done”.³¹

Despite a design that was closely aligned with federal goals, and the sense of anonymity this created, Strutt contributed to solving a technical problem with the control tower by designing windows that angled outwards to eliminate glare, a solution which would become standard nationwide.³² He was also involved in all aspects of the terminal’s design, including that of the interior. As Walter Prokosh noted in 1951, “of all types of facilities built to serve the needs of modern man, the airport probably demands a higher degree of collaboration among the design professions than any other.”³³

Strutt picked both furniture and drapes throughout the interior of the air terminal.³⁴ Canadian design firm Robin Bush Associates designed the bright yellow, blue, and tan prima-steel component furniture for the Uplands Air Terminal. Warning that “having designed a good building, and having enhanced it with interesting sculpture, the over-all effect can still be ruined by badly designed furnishings,” Robin Bush Associates pointed to their ‘well-designed’ functional furniture that was intended to ‘complement the architectural concept’.³⁵ While durable and cost effective, the Robin Bush furniture was also intended to provide a welcoming atmosphere by introducing a domestic effect. Intended to create a ‘cultured atmosphere’ through modernist architecture, Canadian art, and tasteful furnishings, the overall furniture selection was also integral to another federal goal: to expose Canadian citizens to good design.³⁶ In Canadian airports like the Uplands Air Terminal, the approach to the interior was considered holistically in order to set an example of good design while reinforcing a new type of glamorous interior space, and ultimately fostering a nationalist atmosphere. Though Strutt selected the furniture, it is likely that the D.O.T also held considerable influence over the

³¹ The Ottawa Citizen, "From Airport To Outhouse", 1966.

³² Hierlihy and Truesdale, "Strutt House", 3.

³³ Walther Prokosh, "Airport Design: Its Architectural Aspects", *Architectural Record* 109, no. 1 (1951): 112.

³⁴ Strutt, "Three International Airports", 510.

³⁵ "Robin Bush", *Canadian Art* 17, no. 11 (1960): 369.

³⁶ Flaman, "When "La Dolce Vita" Met "True Canadianism", 19.

decision, as furniture designed by Robin Bush was also used in subsequent airport projects like the new terminal in Toronto.³⁷

Working within this interior program, Strutt also designed the light fixtures in the public and VIP areas³⁸ and picked interior finish materials, noting his choices were “studied at great length with appropriateness to location and the community.”³⁹ Though the building was replete with stainless steel,⁴⁰ the inclusion of warmer elements such as checkered walnut wood flooring in the restaurant area suited Strutt’s own design preference for warmer materials.⁴¹

Though Strutt’s original designs had been adapted to fit federal visions of cultural homogeneity, the D.O.T’s new approach to art in airports and the inclusion of sculpted art at the Ottawa Uplands Terminal building dovetailed closely with Strutt’s own interest in the integration of art and architecture. Strutt ultimately believed that, “a building of any sort should be a place to awaken our senses. Most of us are desperately dead, and don’t know it. We’re never aware of what we are, or what we’re doing. We’re robots.”⁴² While by its very nature, the pared down functionalism of an airport building could heighten this sense of dispassion, art was seen as a way to combat the lifelessness that Strutt abhorred. As Anita Aarons concedes, “the air terminal – functional, inorganic, aseptic, and colorless – functioning well in a machine like way often dismays by its inhumanity,” she also notes, “reassurance is engendered by the intrusion spasmodically of metaphysic beguilements – the art of man.”⁴³

Perhaps more pointedly, the new wave of air terminal construction in the 1950s and 1960s provided a way to project a unique Canadian culture through art and architecture, a need that was made evident in the Massey-Levesque Commission of 1951. Bernard Flaman argues that the inclusion of art in the airports can be seen as a tangible example of the goals of the Massey Commission, and

³⁷ Windsor-Liscombe, "Grounding The New Perspectives Of Modernism", 9.

³⁸ Gilleland & Strutt Architects, "Uplands Air Terminal, Luminaire Details for Main Lobby & VIP Room", Half Plan and Section. (Ottawa, June 1958), James W. Strutt Fonds. Library and Archives Canada.

³⁹ Strutt, "Three International Airports", 510.

⁴⁰ Bruce, "New Uplands Has Everything".

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ottawa Citizen, "From Airport To Outhouse".

⁴³ Aarons, "The Dual Nature Of Commissioned Work", 13.

“an attempt to portray Canada as a modern unified country at the start of the Jet Age.”⁴⁴ The Massey Commission had produced a report on the state of the arts in Canada, and provided suggestions to institutions, calling on the federal government to establish a uniquely Canadian identity through art and culture,⁴⁵ and the airport projects provided a place from which to begin. While the Government’s Fine Art Programme, a program suggested by Deputy Minister of Transport, John R. Baldwin, in which one half of one percent of the construction budget was to be allotted to public art, was not approved until December of 1964,⁴⁶ the beginnings of an interest in integrating art and architecture in airports could be seen in early terminals like Ottawa and Halifax.

In Ottawa, two large sculptural pieces for the Uplands Air Terminal were commissioned from Canadian artist, Louis Archambault. Born in 1915 in Montreal, Archambault was a prominent modernist sculptor. Hailed as “an innovator in the world of modern Canadian art,” Archambault gained international recognition in the 1950s, exhibiting at the 1951 Festival of Britain in London, and later at both the Milan Triennale in 1954 and the Venice Biennale in 1956.⁴⁷

For the Uplands Air Terminal in Ottawa, Archambault designed an architectural screen and large stylized sculptures entitled *Shape of Flight*. Located by the main entryway to the air terminal, the monumental screen comprised alternating aluminum columns in various organic shapes. Described as a procession of six alternating archetypal characters, the rough geometric figures reflect Archambault’s interest in the theme of man and woman and the relationship between masculine and feminine form.⁴⁸ The screen’s rough texture and monumental size provides a contrast and backdrop to Archambault’s second piece for the airport, *Shape of Flight*. Located above the reflecting pools, the sculptures are sleek abstracted symbols of flight and have been described as “stylized geese”.⁴⁹ Made of sharply curved aluminum, the pieces ironically do not stray far from Strutt’s original idea for the

⁴⁴ Flaman, "The Airport As City Square", 5.

⁴⁵ *Royal Commission on National Developments in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences 1949-1951* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, C.M.G., O.A., D.S.P, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951), 271-272.

⁴⁶ Catherine Anderson-Dolcini, "One Percent for Whom? Canada’s Public Works Fine Art Programme, 1964-1978: Its Rise and Demise" (Master of Arts, Carleton University, 2000): 1.

⁴⁷ M.J Stone, "Louis Archambault 1915-2003: Quebec Sculptor Had His Muse", *The Globe And Mail*, 2003.

⁴⁸ Guy Robert, "Archambault : Le Monumental Et La Sérénité", *Vie des arts* 67 (1972): 43.

⁴⁹ Shanahan, "Ottawa Architect Championed Modernist Age In Canadian Design".

hyperbolic paraboloid roofs. Both pieces belie Archambault's signature style that oscillates between serene and stark geometric compositions, and often balances form and empty space, weight and weightlessness.⁵⁰

Archambault's work was favorably received, and in Alan Jarvis' review of the Allied Arts, it is described as 'elegant' and 'monumental' and lauded as a rare good example of art in federal buildings.⁵¹ An early example of art in airports, Archambault's works at the Uplands Air Terminal offset the stark functionality of the airport and helped create an impressive terminal building. Moreover, the inclusion of art at the Uplands Air Terminal illustrates the D.O.T's early interest in the use of Canadian modern art to bolster a national identity in their air terminals, foretelling of the Fine Art Programme to come.

The inclusion of Archambault's work at the Uplands Air Terminal fit with Strutt's own ideations about art and architecture. Throughout his career, art was incorporated into a number of Strutt's architectural designs, such as his design for the 1966 Canadian Nurses Headquarters in Ottawa which features sculpted reliefs by Eleanor Milne,⁵² or the inclusion of a tiled ceramic mural by Jean-Paul Mousseau on the Jackson Building in downtown Ottawa.⁵³ Though it is unknown if Strutt was involved in the selection process in the Uplands Air Terminal, Alan Jarvis notes that in Canada "it is clear that the architects have played a key role, first of all in selling his client on a good building design, then on the importance of using sculptors or muralists – and the client may be a federal deputy minister, as with Gander and Uplands."⁵⁴ Regardless, Strutt praises Archambault's work in the December 1960 issues of the RAIC Journal, and his enthusiasm for the terminal building is most keenly felt in his description of the sculptural elements:

One of the most satisfying aspects of the design of the Ottawa Terminal was the DOT's interest in the use of sculpture as an integral part of the architectural concept. Sculptor Louis Archambault is to be commended for his conceptualization and co-operation in this regard. It has been most gratifying to hear the great number of favourable comments from lay -people

⁵⁰ J Stone, "Louis Archambault 1915-2003".

⁵¹ Alan Jarvis, "Art Means Business", *Canadian Art* 17, no. 11 (1960): 349.

⁵² Shanahan, "Ottawa Architect Championed Modernist Age In Canadian Design".

⁵³ *Ottawa Journal*, "Be Heard", 1976.

⁵⁴ Jarvis, "Art Means Business", 349.

who are enjoying this contribution to the arts of Canada.⁵⁵

The integration of art and architecture also fit with Archambault's sensibilities and interest in "total expression."⁵⁶ As a sculptor, Archambault believed "the artist should be in the thick of everyday life," and was pleased with "architects who were "gradually beginning to call upon artists, sculptors, muralists, for their service – a healthy sign for both architecture and art."⁵⁷ In the setting of the new modern airport, which quickly came to be "primarily facilities for handling people – that is, the emphasis has shifted from "planes flying" to "people flying",⁵⁸ Archambault's work would be directly situated in the hustle and bustle of modern life at the entrance to the air terminal building.

It is clear that the views of both Strutt and Archambault were not far apart. Two key figures in Canadian modern art and architecture respectively, both Archambault and Strutt completed further commissions for the D.O.T. Strutt would go on to design the International Airport in Halifax, and Archambault would later complete a sculpted commission for the new airport in Toronto.

The construction of the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal was delayed by one year due to a jet blast caused by a low-flying RCAF jet that damaged construction in 1959,⁵⁹ and Prime Minister Diefenbaker officially opened the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal in June of 1960.⁶⁰ Described as a "lean and shining civilian air centre",⁶¹ the five million dollar, 200,000 square foot terminal anticipated 900,000 travellers a year.⁶² Though the D.O.T anticipated the growing number of fliers and cited their plans for expansions and adjustments that their facilities would require in 'some 20 years from now',⁶³ the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal was replaced in 2003 after numerous upgrades and expansions.⁶⁴ During this time, the Archambault sculptures were lost, and though there have

⁵⁵ Strutt, "Three International Airports", 510.

⁵⁶ J.A Norman. "Louis Archambault", *Canadian Art* 17, no. 11 (1960): 353.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Prokosch, "Airport Design: Its Architectural Aspects", 112.

⁵⁹ Strutt, "Three International Airports", 509.

⁶⁰ McGrath, *A History Of Canadian Airports*, 51.

⁶¹ Bruce, "New Uplands Has Everything".

⁶² Ministère des Transports, *Ottawa Aerogare*.

⁶³ "The Shape Of Flight", *News on the DOT*, 4.

⁶⁴ "The Past: A Brief History Of The Ottawa International Airport", *YOW*, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://yow.ca/en/corporate/about-us/history>.

been claims of their re-surfacing at the Cohen & Cohen scrapyards in Nepean,⁶⁵ this claim is still unsubstantiated and their whereabouts remain unknown today.

While the design of the Uplands Air Terminal has taken a backseat to the larger projects of Toronto, Edmonton, and Winnipeg that followed, the conception of the Ottawa Uplands Air Terminal and its early integration of art and architecture, pointed to a turning point in airport design in Canada and to larger ideas about the inclusion of art and its relationship to architecture. Linked to modern rhetoric and concern about Canadian culture, the terminal in Ottawa was not only an important example of an early airport designed during the D.O.T's nationwide building campaign, but also an example of integrated design that speaks to the sensibilities of both James W. Strutt and Louis Archambault, two important Canadian modernists. Moreover, though the project was a federal commission and heavily influenced by the D.O.T, Gilleland & Strutt's early designs also provide a glimpse of Strutt's own architectural sensibilities and experimentations, which he would continue to explore throughout his career.

⁶⁵ Midcentury Modernist, "Uplands Airport", Blog, *Urbsite*, 2002, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://urbsite.blogspot.ca/2012/12/uplands-airport.html>.

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