STOLEN BEAUTY

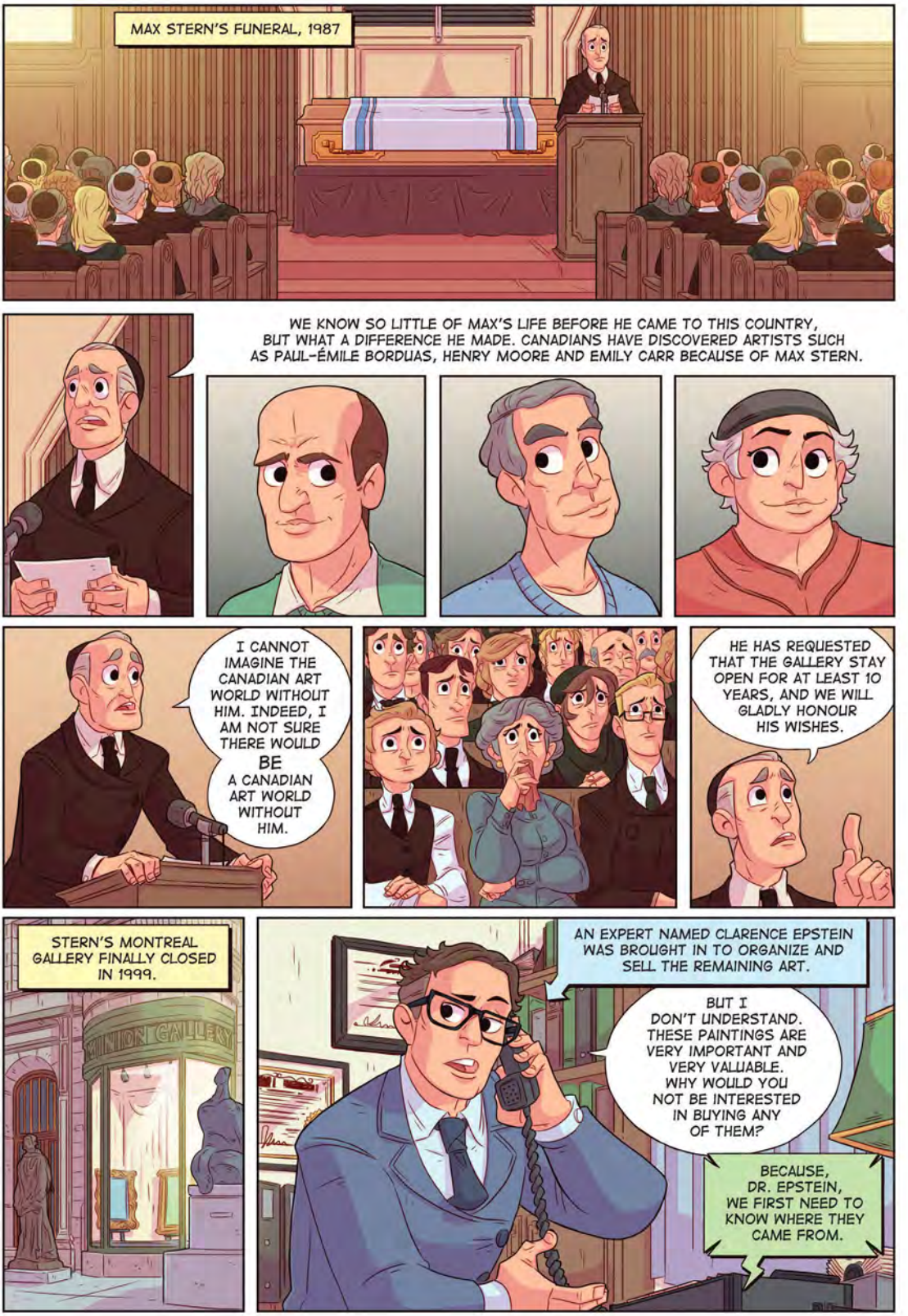
ALEX DIOCHON



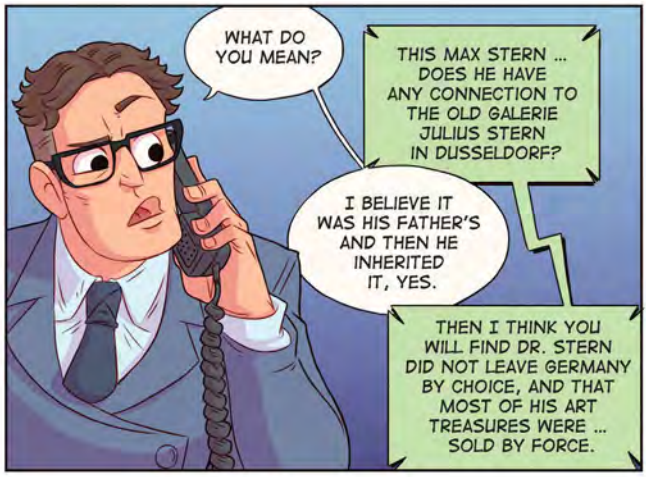

THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS! THESE BUYERS ARE PAYING LESS THAN HALF OF WHAT IT'S WORTH!
THEY ARE NAZIS AND I AM A JEW. THEY ARE FORCING ME TO SELL. AT LEAST THE MONEY MIGHT HELP ME START OVER IN A NEW COUNTRY.
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ART?
ENGLAND, 1940
WE ESCAPED DEATH IN GERMANY ONLY TO BE IMPRISONED IN ENGLAND?
I GUESS THEY THINK WE'RE SPIES FOR HITLER BECAUSE WE SPEAK GERMAN.
I HEARD IF WE VOLUNTEER, THEY'LL SEND US TO CANADA. THEY NEED THESE GUARDS TO FIGHT IN THE WAR.


AN INTERNMENT CAMP IN NEW BRUNSWICK
A PLACE WHERE GERMANS, KNOWN AS "ENEMY ALIENS," ARE FORCED TO LIVE AND WORK. THEY HAD TO WEAR UNIFORMS SO THEY COULD BE RECOGNIZED IF THEY TRIED TO RUN AWAY.
CHOCK
DON'T THESE CANADIANS KNOW THAT WE HATE THE NAZIS AS MUCH AS THEY DO?
CHOCK
THEY JUST KNOW WE'RE ALL GERMANS. BUT LOOK!
WE'RE ALIVE, WE HAVE CLOTHES TO WEAR AND FOOD TO EAT.
WHY DON'T YOU COME TO MY LECTURE THIS AFTERNOON? TAKE YOUR MIND OFF THINGS. I'LL BE TALKING ABOUT VAN GOGH.
MONTREAL BUSINESSMAN WILLIAM BIRKS, WHO WAS AGAINST THE INTERNMENT CAMPS, ARRANGED FOR STERN TO BE FREED. STERN TURNED TO WHAT HE KNEW BEST.


MONTREAL, 1944
IF YOU MAKE ME YOUR PARTNER, MRS. MILLMAN, I WILL MAKE YOU A FORTUNE. I WANT TO USE MY KNOWLEDGE TO HELP CANADA.
ROSE MILLMAN, OWNER OF THE DOMINION GALLERY OF FINE ART
DEAL!
WONDERFUL! THERE'S AN ARTIST OUT IN B.C. I'D LIKE TO GO SEE.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY CANADA DOESN'T HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE IN ITS OWN ARTISTS.
VICTORIA, B.C., A FEW WEEKS LATER
EMILY CARR
SO YOU AGREE TO ALLOW ME TO MOUNT A SHOW OF YOUR WORKS IN MONTREAL?
YOU WILL NOT SELL A SINGLE PAINTING.
IF YOU LET ME CHOOSE THE PAINTINGS, I THINK I CAN MAKE IT A PERFECT SUCCESS.
A FEW MONTHS LATER
NEVER SEEN SUCH A FAT CHEQUE
-EMILY


MAX STERN'S FUNERAL, 1987
WE KNOW SO LITTLE OF MAX'S LIFE BEFORE HE CAME TO THIS COUNTRY, BUT WHAT A DIFFERENCE HE MADE. CANADIANS HAVE DISCOVERED ARTISTS SUCH AS PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS, HENRY MOORE AND EMILY CARR BECAUSE OF MAX STERN.
I CANNOT IMAGINE THE CANADIAN ART WORLD WITHOUT HIM. INDEED, I AM NOT SURE THERE WOULD BE A CANADIAN ART WORLD WITHOUT HIM.
HE HAS REQUESTED THAT THE GALLERY STAY OPEN FOR AT LEAST 10 YEARS, AND WE WILL GLADLY HONOUR HIS WISHES.
STERN'S MONTREAL GALLERY FINALLY CLOSED IN 1999.
AN EXPERT NAMED CLARENCE EPSTEIN WAS BROUGHT IN TO ORGANIZE AND SELL THE REMAINING ART.
BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THESE PAINTINGS ARE VERY IMPORTANT AND VERY VALUABLE. WHY WOULD YOU NOT BE INTERESTED IN BUYING ANY OF THEM?
BECAUSE, DR. EPSTEIN, WE FIRST NEED TO KNOW WHERE THEY CAME FROM.









MAX STERN'S FRIENDS EVENTUALLY LEARNED THAT THE MAN WHO HELPED CANADIANS APPRECIATE THEIR OWN ARTISTS HAD ANOTHER WHOLE STORY FROM BEFORE THE WAR — THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MORE THAN 400 ARTWORKS THAT BELONGED TO HIM PERSONALLY OR TO THE GALLERY.

EITHER THE NAZIS FORCED HIM TO AUCTION THE ART OFF FOR A TINY FRACTION OF WHAT IT WAS WORTH, OR THEY SIMPLY TOOK WHAT THEY WANTED. AFTERWARD, THEY FROZE HIS BANK ACCOUNTS SO HE DIDN'T RECEIVE A PENNY FROM THE FORCED SALE. STERN SPENT DECADES AFTER THE WAR SEARCHING EUROPE FOR THE MISSING ART, BUT LOCATED JUST A FEW PIECES.





IN 2002, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY LAUNCHED THE MAX STERN ART RESTITUTION PROJECT. FOUR YEARS LATER, THE FIRST ITEM FROM STERN'S COLLECTION WAS RETURNED: *AIMEE, A YOUNG EGYPTIAN* BY EMILE LECOMTE-VERNET. TO THIS DAY, THE RESTITUTION PROJECT CONTINUES TO WORK TO PROVE WHICH PIECES MAX STERN LOST TO THE EVIL OF HIS DAY, AND TO HAVE THEM RETURNED IN HIS NAME. WE HAVE IMAGINED THESE SCENES AND CONVERSATIONS, BUT MAX STERN'S STORY IS TRUE, AND A TRULY AMAZING PART OF CANADA'S ART HISTORY.

