

Franklin Carmichael

Bissett Farm, 1933

watercolour on paper
50.0 cm x 66.0 cm

Collection of the Vancouver Art
Gallery, Gift of the Artist
VAG 33.27



Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

Franklin Carmichael

Bissett Farm, 1933

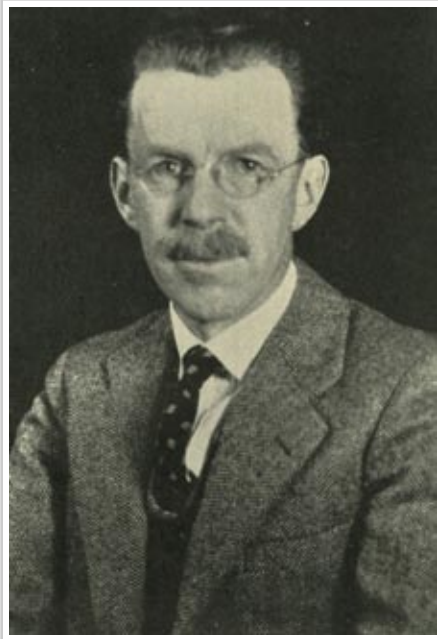


Image source: Vancouver Art Gallery Library
Canadian Artist Files

Artist's Biography

Nationality: Canadian
Born: 1890-05-04, Orillia, Ontario
Died: 1945-10-24

Franklin Carmichael was born in Orillia, Ontario in 1890. He studied first at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto, and later at the Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp, 1914-1915. He was an original member of the Group of Seven, 1920, the Canadian Group of Painters, 1933, and of the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour, A.R.C.A., 1935; R.C.A., 1938. He was an instructor at the Ontario College of Art, 1932-45, while he painted the landscape mainly in northern Ontario. He died in Toronto.

Carmichael sponsored a purely Canadian art expression as opposed to the European tradition. While employed as an office boy at a graphic arts firm in Toronto, Carmichael met then commercial designers J.E.H. MacDonald, Tom Thomson, and Arthur Lismer. His pictures hang in the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Hart House, and St. Hilda's College, Toronto, the Art Gallery of Vancouver, the National Gallery, Cape Town, as well as in many private collections.

Source: Vancouver Art Gallery Library Canadian Artist Files: Carmichael, Franklin.

Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian

Training: Ontario College of Art; Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp

Group: Group of Seven; Canadian Group of Painters; Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolours; 20th century

Peers: Tom Thomson; J.E.H. MacDonald; Arthur Lismer; Lawren Harris; Frank Johnston; Frederick Varley; A.Y. Jackson

Provenance: donated by the artist in 1933

Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, c.1912
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 96.9.1

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, c.1914
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 96.9.2

Franklin Carmichael
Winter Trees, c. 1918
oil on paperboard

Franklin Carmichael

Bissett Farm, 1933

Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 96.9.3

Franklin Carmichael
Lilac Bush and House, c.1928
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 96.9.4

Franklin Carmichael
Hills - Pines, 1936
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 96.9.5

Franklin Carmichael
Deadwood, 1923
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.1

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, circa 1924
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.2

Franklin Carmichael
Port Coldwell, 1925
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.3

Franklin Carmichael
Rocks, Leaf Pattern, Miner's Bay, circa 1935
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.4

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, circa 1936
oil on panel
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.5

Franklin Carmichael
Houses, circa 1940
oil on paperboard
Gift of Jane Mastin and James Funk
VAG 99.8.6

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, circa 1924
oil on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.1

Franklin Carmichael

Bissett Farm, 1933

Franklin Carmichael
Looking Down onto Grace Lake, circa 1933
oil on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.2

Franklin Carmichael
Cranberry Lake, circa 1938
oil, graphite on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.3

Franklin Carmichael
Wild Cherry Blossom, 1938
oil on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.4

Franklin Carmichael
Bradford, circa 1940
oil on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.5

Franklin Carmichael
Landscape, circa 1940
oil on paperboard
Gift of James and Barbara Mastin
VAG 99.9.6



Bibliography

Franklin Carmichael, *Watercolours*

Publication
1981

[transcription]

32 *Bissett, Farm, 1933.*

The Watercolours of Franklin Carmichael
BY ROGER BOULET



Quickly! Name the artists in the Group of Seven... A skill-testing question, and many might think to include Thomson, Jackson, Harris and MacDonald in their reply, forgetting the contributions of Lismer, Varley, Carmichael, Johnston and Casson.

The formation of the Group of Seven early in 1920 at Lawren Harris' home in Toronto was actually the culmination of the activities of more or less like-minded painters who often painted together before and during World War I and who were sympathetic to newer methods of putting paint to canvas. The association was very loose. After Johnson left the Group (in 1924), there were six members until Casson was invited to join in 1926. Before MacDonald's death in 1932 there were nine members, Holgate and Fitzgerald having been added to the Group by then. The Group was dissolved in 1933 and the Canadian Group of Painters formed.

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Among the Group of Seven's original members, Franklin Carmichael is often forgotten. Perhaps one of the least controversial he was a very successful commercial artist, loved the work, and after 1932 taught the subject at the Ontario College of Art from 1932 until his death in 1945. The 'commercial' element seems to cause a certain amount of unease among some critics as does Carmichael's deliberate use of that 'lesser' medium of watercolour in his oeuvre. No one has yet determined precisely what Carmichael's contribution to Canadian art was...

As if to correct an injustice, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria's Chief Curator, Ian M. Thom, has organized a magnificent exhibition of thirty-nine Carmichael watercolours. Drawn from both public and private collections, the exhibition establishes that Carmichael's use of the medium was masterful and that his work in it is as noteworthy as was his work in oils.

There is no doubt that Carmichael felt the watercolour medium should be better appreciated in Canada. In 1925, in association with A.J. Casson and Fred H. Brigden (also commercial artists), he formed the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, and served as its President from 1932 to 1934. Most of the watercolours in the Victoria exhibition were done within this nine or ten year period. The others illustrate his early and later work in the medium.



Walter J. Phillips, also a member of the CSPW, knew Carmichael quite well, and in an unpublished manuscript wrote of his fellow-watercolourist's technique: "Whilst sketching, Mr. Carmichael works as directly as possible on dry white paper, beginning at the top, and working straight down to the bottom, striving to obtain the desired effect as speedily as possible. The sketch is begun by making a very careful outline with a black carbon pencil. A bold outline, carefully drawn constitutes an immediate record of the scene, which the addition of colour and tone merely elaborates., "

This process is evident in the three works illustrated here. The La Cloche Hills , c.1930, shows evidence of the dry method in the sky, where the whites are left unpainted, as are most of the areas of water in the

landscape. The pencil outline can be seen in all three watercolours. Whitefish Falls, 1933, is a wonderfully spontaneous sketch, with greens and greys conveying the northern Ontario landscape in the summer.

The Cranberry Lake watercolour of 1934 is typical of Carmichael's taste for panoramic landscapes. The mountains are wonderfully solid, the light foreground helping to give the picture great depth. Once again, a small village gives the landscape a more human scale.

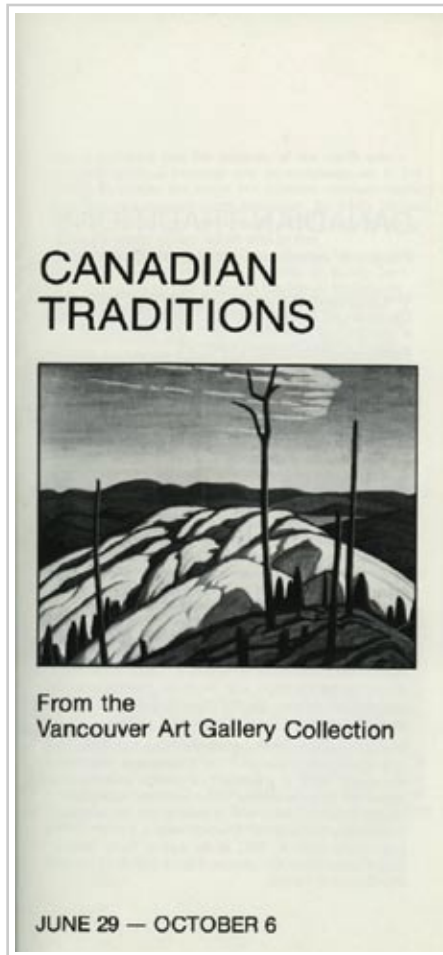
Carmichael had been able to accompany Lawren Harris to the north shore of Lake Superior in 1924, an experience he repeated again in 1925 and 1926. A.J. Casson accompanied him there in 1928. From 1929 onwards, the La Cloche Hills (north of Lake Huron) became a favoured sketching ground. There, he built a cottage for his family in 1932. The cottage enabled him to go out sketching in the area and many of the watercolours in the exhibition are the products of these holiday sojourns away from Toronto.

Carmichael's watercolours, when they appear on the market, tend to fetch high prices, no doubt because of their rarity, but also because of their tranquil excellence. As Phillips said: "The grandeur of that vast country which he paints overwhelms the imaginative soul, points his insignificance, his futility. He paints directly, rapidly, impelled only by the thought the scene inspired. Every brushstroke contributes to the one end. No part is permitted to display beauty in itself, but only in relation to the whole. He makes it manifest that the tree owes life to the elements, the soil to the rock; that the movements of water are directed by the winds and the configuration of the earth. The unity in these designs expresses universal interdependence, a Guiding Hand."

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At the Sotheby sale of Canadian art in Toronto last spring, a 25.6 by 30.6 cm watercolour, estimated to sell at \$15,000 to \$20,000, was sold for \$18,000, making Carmichael's among the most highly priced watercolours in Canada, surpassing those of David Milne. Auction records however, can be misleading. The availability, desirability and quality of an individual work of art, as well as its size, should determine the price. The market is entirely based on supply and demand, and in the case of Franklin Carmichael's work, the supply falls short of the demand.



Canadian Traditions

Publication
1985

[transcription]

CANADIAN TRADITIONS

From the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

The Vancouver Art Gallery has extensive holdings of Canadian art in its collection. This exhibition features a selection of those holdings to represent certain aspects of the Canadian tradition.

The earliest works are portraits and landscapes by eastern Canadian painters who worked in European traditions. Paul Peel was a student of the academic Parisian artist, Jean-Léon Gérôme. His highly polished surface and interest in domestic allegory are seen in his *Reading the Future*, 1883. Twentieth century figurative and portrait works include Frederick Varley's (1881-1969) *Untitled Figure Study*, 1939 and Randolph Stanley Hewton's (1888-1960) art deco portrait of *Mrs Thomas Caverhill nee Robertson*, 1925. Early landscapes include Cornelius Krieghoff's (1815-1872) *Indian Encampment* which is typical of the nineteenth century European idealization of Indian life. Krieghoff immigrated to Canada as a relatively young man in his early thirties and lived here most of his life. The influence of French Impressionism is seen in Quebec artist Marc Auréle de Foy Suzor-Coté's (1869-1937) *Winter Street Scene*, 1918, while Homer Watson's (1855-1936) *The Load of Grass*, c. 1898, harks back to the romantic tradition with its noble treatment of the pastoral landscape. Earthy colours and thick paint are used to express a rapport with rural nature.

But the strength of this gallery's Canadian collection is in the modern period. Tom Thomson's (1887-1917) *Nocturne*, 1915, is a brilliant oil sketch which creates a sensation of pure colour—an abstract sensation meant to correspond with a feeling for landscape. Thomson's achievement, which was cut short by his premature death in 1917 at the age of thirty, was a major inspiration for Lawren Harris (1885-1970) and the Group of Seven.

Harris believed that the imagery of the north was a national spiritual heritage and he endeavoured, in the 1920s, to render the bleak but sublime northern terrain in terms of a metaphysical geometry. By 1940, he had moved on from representational art to paint visionary abstract works which allied him to the Transcendentalists of the United States. He was an influence on, and an early supporter of, Emily Carr and spent the last 33 years of his life in Vancouver where he made an enormous contribution to the introduction of modernist ideas in this city. Eleven very fine Harris drawings, recently donated to the gallery by his daughter, Mrs James H. Knox, will be exhibited for the first time.

Works by other members of the Group, including two recently acquired paintings by A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974) are also included in the exhibition.

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The gallery also owns a fine selection of the work of David Milne (1882-1953). Milne pursued nature in a very Canadian way. Like Tom Thomson before him or the painters of the Group of Seven, he spent months in isolated wilderness in search of his motif. Milne disliked the idealism of the Group and forged a unique and individual vision of nature. His delicate and sensual watercolours are among the highlights of Canadian art history.

Works of social commentary are also displayed. They include Maxwell Bates' (1906-1980) caustic canvas *Beautiful B.C.*, 1966. Almost twenty years old this work still has the power to offend and amuse.

The experience of the Second World War is reflected in watercolours by Jack Shadbolt, a painting by Mary Ritter Hamilton and prints by Frederick Taylor. Also included are post-war works which demonstrate the strength of an expressionist tradition based on nature in Canadian painting. Works by Alistair Bell (b. 1913) and Jack Shadbolt (b. 1909) depict nature not as ideal form but as growing and decaying substance and as a metaphor of the human condition in the modern world.

Scott Watson

Further Reading

Bice, Megan. *Light and Shadow: the Work of Franklin Carmichael*. Kleinberg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1990.

Franklin Carmichael, Watercolours. Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1981.

Hubbard, R.H. *Canadian Landscape Painting 1670-1930*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973.

Thom, Ian. *Franklin Carmichael*. Kleinburg: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1984.

Exhibition History

List of Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour Travelling Exhibition. August 25, 1937 - September 14, 1937.

Watercolours. February - May 1976.

Canadian Traditions. June 29, 1985 - October 6, 1985.

Land/scape. September 19, 1986 - November 16, 1986.

From the Collection: The Group of Seven. June 16, 1990 - September 16, 1990.

75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.

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Bissett Farm, 1933

Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

Western Canadian Art Circuit. *Group of Seven*. 1954.

Simon Fraser University Art Gallery, Burnaby. *The Group of Seven and their Contemporaries*. July 18 - August 5, 1977.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria. *Franklin Carmichael Watercolours*. September 3 - October 30, 1981.



Archival History

Report of Purchase & Acceptance Committee Acquisition Record

[transcription of excerpt]

Report of Purchase & Acceptance Committee

A meeting of this Committee was held on September the 26th.

Re: Watercolour by Frank Carmichael —Selected from the Exhibition of Canadian Society of Painters in watercolours. RESOLVED that this picture be recommended for purchase to the Founders, to be referred through them to the Council for final acceptance.

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