

Arthur Lismer

Pine Trees, Georgian Bay, 1931

oil on board
46.9 cm x 54.0 cm

Collection of the Vancouver Art
Gallery, Gift of H. Mortimer Lamb
VAG 41.4



Photo: Jim Jardine, Vancouver Art Gallery

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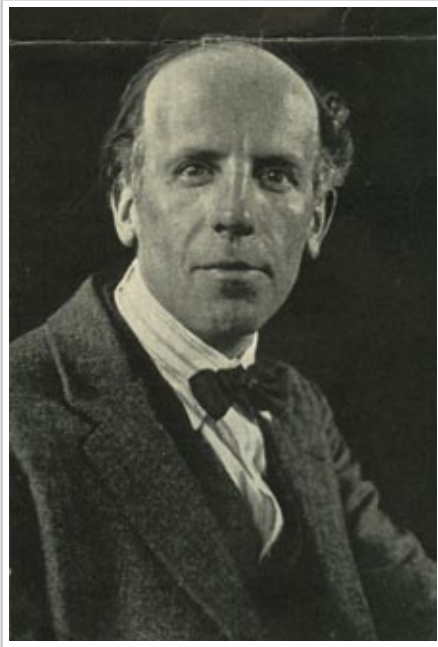


Image source: Vancouver Art Gallery Library
Canadian Artist Files

Artist's Biography

Nationality: Canadian
Born: 1885-06-27, Sheffield, England
Died: 1969-03-23

Arthur Lismer was born in Sheffield England in 1885. He studied at the Sheffield School of Art and the Antwerp Academy before emigrating to Toronto in 1911. He found work as a commercial artist at the Grip Ltd. along with future Group of Seven members J.E.H. MacDonald and Fred Varley. In 1914 he began to take regular painting excursions to Algonquin Park with Tom Thomson. Lismer taught at the Ontario College of Art and was principle of the Nova Scotia College of Art. During the War he painted in Halifax for the Canadian War Memorials. Although Lismer continued to paint regularly throughout his life, he devoted much of his time to art education. He served as the educational supervisor at the Art Gallery of Toronto from 1927 to 1938, and throughout the 1930s he traveled frequently, lecturing at conferences, and teaching in South Africa for a year. In 1938 he was a visiting professor at the Teacher's College at Columbia University and afterwards settled in Montreal, running the Children's Art Centre from 1941 to 1967.

Source: Vancouver Art Gallery Library Permanent Collection Files: Lismer, Arthur

Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian

Training: Sheffield School of Art; Academie Royal des Be aux-Arts, Antwerp.

Peers: John Constable; J.E.H. MacDonald; Tom Thomson; Franklin Carmichael; Frank Johnston; Fred Varley; A.Y. Jackson; Lawren Harris

Group: Canadian War Memorials; Group of Seven; Canadian Group of Painters; 20th century

Provenance: donated by H. Mortimer Lamb in 1941; the artist

Subject: landscape; land based nationalism ; Georgian Bay

Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Arthur Lismer
Skunk Cabbage, 1953
oil on board
Vancouver Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Provincial School Scheme
VAG 70.42

Arthur Lismer
Stream in the Forest, 1960
oil on canvas board
Vancouver Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Provincial School Scheme
VAG 70.43

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Arthur Lismer
Long Beach, B.C.
conté and stump on wove paper
Gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges
VAG 88.37.1

Arthur Lismer
Long Beach
felt tip pen on wove paper
Gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges
VAG 88.37.2

Arthur Lismer
Skunk Cabbage
ink on wove paper
Gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges
VAG 88.37.3

Arthur Lismer
Georgian Bay, 1935
oil on wood panel
Gift of J. Melvin Scott
VAG 88.40.1

Arthur Lismer
Landscape, Vancouver Island, 1966
ink wash on wove paper
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. C. Reif
VAG 88.41.12

Arthur Lismer
Vancouver Island, B.C.
oil on canvas
Gift of Garth & Lynette Thurber
VAG 92.59

Arthur Lismer
Charity is a Crime
carbon pencil on paper
Gift of Laing and Kathleen Brown
VAG 92.64

Arthur Lismer
Landscape
ink on paper
Gift of Gordon and Marion Smith
VAG 94.21

Arthur Lismer
Pine Silhouettes, Georgian Bay
oil on panel
Gift of Dr. Abraham and Mrs. Naomi Greenberg
VAG 95.45.3

Arthur Lismer
Cow Parsley, Wickaninnish Beach, West Coast of Vancouver Island, 1958
oil on wood panel
Gift of Margaret Knox
VAG 96.20

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Arthur Lismer
September Gale
oil on wood panel
The Parnell Bequest
VAG 2000.39.4

Arthur Lismer
McGregor Bay
oil on masonite
The Parnell Bequest
VAG 2000.39.5

Arthur Lismer
In the Forest, B.C.
oil on panel
Gift of Robert George Curtis in memory of his mother Doris G. Curtis
VAG 2001.34.2



Bibliography

Souvenir Catalogue: Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951.
Publication
1951-09-26

[transcription]

SOUTH GALLERY CANADIAN PICTURES FROM OUR PERMANENT COLLECTION

Soon after its foundation, the Vancouver Art Gallery was presented by the Founders with three Canadian paintings, by James W. Morrice, A. Y. Jackson, and H. Mabel May respectively. These three pictures are hanging in this exhibition and, as one may see, constituted an auspicious beginning for the building of a Canadian collection.

The Morrice, "On the Beach, Dinard", is a small but fine example of this most sensitive and lyrical of Canadian painters who died in 1924. The A. Y. Jackson, "Road to St. Fidele" is typical of the full rhythmic style which distinguishes his position in the Group of Seven, the first concerted movement in Canadian painting history. A dramatic Arthur Lismer, "Pine Trees, Georgian Bay", a soberly splendid J. E. H. MacDonald, "Church by the Sea", a discerning and painterly portrait of H. Mortimer Lamb by F. H. Varley (all three the gift of Mr. Lamb), and a brilliant later Jackson, further represent work by the original 'Seven'. Lawren Harris, also a member of the Group, is represented in this selection by a very recent work.

The influence of the Group was evidenced in the broad landscape style which dominated Canadian painting for some years, a good example of which is here shown in Mabel May's "Autumn in the Laurentians". (This spring the Gallery will hold an exhibition of the work of Miss May who now lives in Vancouver). The tradition of landscape, of course, has continued right up to the present in varying personal interpretations: David Milne, best known for his delicate imaginative watercolors, here shows a brilliantly executed oil; Edward Hughes, a Victoria painter, hangs a landscape of arresting intentness; James MacDonald, a young Vancouver painter, brings the landscape to the city in a richly painted canvas.

Since the time of the Group of Seven, new elements, new trends, already manifest elsewhere, have been finding their expression in our painting. Some of

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them are reflected in this exhibition. There is the showy realism of W. A. Winter's "Midnight at Charlie's"; the melancholy of Jack Nichols' turpentine wash painting of children, the loneliness of Don Jarvis' "Old Man"; the element of expressionism present in Fritz Brandtner's semi-abstract landscape. There is too, the concern with form, to a greater or lesser degree stripped of its representational references: as in Molly Bobak, for its sensuous life; as in B.C. Binning for its own structural life; as in the Lawren Harris as a means to a metaphysical meaning.

This selection of painting well demonstrates that this Gallery may be proud of its Canadian collection, and Canada of her painters.

DORIS SHADBOLT
Vancouver Art Gallery Docent



As We See It: An Exhibition of Canadian Art

Publication
1981

[transcription]

ARTHUR LISMER

Arthur Lismer, a gifted artist, was an equally gifted educator. His beliefs concerning every individual's creative potential carried him above and beyond the confinement of the reiteration of mechanical skills.

"Art is a way of life. It is experience lived, shared and enjoyed. It is in the rhythm and order of nature..."

Art was not simply a livelihood to him. It was a lifestyle. He devoted many years of his life to instilling this philosophy into the lives and efforts of his students.

One of his outstanding students was Gwen Lamont, who studied with him and other members of the group. She was made an Associate of the Ontario College of Art and spent the last twenty-eight years of her life in Kelowna. Like Lismer she was intensely interested in children's art and gave unstintingly of her talent to the community. The influence of the group is apparent in Gwen's work, of which several examples are held in the collection of the Kelowna Museum.

As with the others, Lismer was pursuing the field of commercial art when he began his association with the Group of Seven.

From his earliest years Lismer continuously sketched the things around him. Revealing a sense of humour, many of these sketches were caricatures and cartoons.

Perhaps as part of his celebration of life, Arthur Lismer held a great amount of affection and concern for children. He made an outstanding contribution to children's art education. He believed that technical skills would only be made viable if children were first introduced to freedom of expression and visualization of form.

Among his accomplishments Lismer was an educator at Columbia University in New York, and McGill University in Montreal. He became world renowned for his teaching methods and traveled on request to share his views in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.



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Canadian Pictures, 1951

Publication
1982

[transcription]

The Vancouver Art Gallery

CANADIAN PICTURES, 1951

December 4, 1982 - March 20, 1983

This exhibition was first hung in September, 1951, for the opening of the expanded and renovated Vancouver Art Gallery. The exhibition was meant to show the gallery's Canadian holdings. Needless to say, 31 years later, our Canadian collection is much richer than this small but strong beginning. In rehanging this exhibition as we prepare to leave this building—cramped and out of date now, but Canada's most modern gallery then—we have an opportunity to see what Canadian painting meant over thirty years ago.

The works demonstrate currents in Canadian art history which were prevalent at the time. The Group of Seven are represented with their spiritual topographies of Canada's North. Social Realism, a movement in Canadian painting of the 30's and 40's which reacted to the lack of a human element in the Group of Seven's work, is represented by Bill Winter and Orville Fisher; the existential city by Don Jarvis, Jim MacDonald and Ghitta Caiserman, and the move to abstraction in the work of Lawren Harris, Fritz Brandtner and B.C. Binning.

Painted before the influx of American ideas about painting, these works are all fairly small in scale. They are easel paintings, meant for private homes in an era, before Art Bank, The Canada Council and the growth of corporate collecting, when the sale of pictures to a private patron was still the major source of income (other than teaching) for artists in Canada.

These works also deal with images and subject-matter and have a great deal of interest as documents. That is, they record personal views of the world the artists lived in and are kind of a window to the past. Although the styles exhibited here might seem rigid or stiff today, we should remember that many of these artists were emerging from training that was grounded in nineteenth century techniques that emphasized drawing over "painting". And works like these, where line and colour are used for their emotional impact, are very much in a tradition which, far from being dead, we see revived in the "new" painting of the 1980's.

Scott Watson
Curator

[Pine, Georgian Bay in blue ink]

Arthur Lismer

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Vancouver Collects

Publication
2001

[transcription]

THE GROUP OF SEVEN: CANADA'S NATIONAL SCHOOL OF PAINTERS

New material demands new methods and new methods fling a challenge to old conventions. It is as impossible to depict the autumn pageantry of our northern woods with a lead pencil as it is to bind our young art with the conventions and methods of other climates and other ages.

(Foreword to the catalogue of the 1922 Group of Seven exhibition, written by the artists)



Established in 1920, the Group of Seven emerged from Toronto as a collective of self-proclaimed modern artists. The Group was initially drawn together by a common frustration with the conservative nature of most Canadian art of the time. The work in contention held up antiquated colonial traditions and a constraining imitative style that the Group chose to reject for new visual material, subject and methods. That new material and subject matter was found primarily in the Canadian wilderness: the Group sought to depict a raw Canada with a modern method and style that reflected the country's adolescent potential in the face of past tradition.

The work of the Group of Seven has become for many Canadians synonymous with Canadian art, even for those who cannot identify all of the members of the Group. Although the Group of Seven was initially a movement concentrated in central Canada, their influence and importance was felt across the country. Indeed, of the ten members of the Group, seven visited or lived in British Columbia at one time or another to make their art.



The first Group of Seven exhibition seen in BC was in 1922 and their work was also included in exhibitions in 1924, long before an art gallery was a permanent presence in the community. However, it was not until Varley arrived in Vancouver in 1926 that the influence of the Group was directly felt in the work of this region. Varley's approach to landscape painting, going out into the landscape to paint directly from his subject matter, encouraged others to follow his example.

The other member of the Group of Seven who had a major influence on the art and artists of this region was Lawren Harris. His influence can be seen first through his friendship with and support of Emily Carr, by which he directly altered the course of landscape painting. Secondly, when he lived in Vancouver and his own work had become abstract, he encouraged artists to approach abstraction.

The artists in the Group were held together by their stylistic and nationalistic ideology, presenting themselves as Canada's national school of painters. As a collective, they sought to affirm a contemporary nationalism through their depiction of a vast and rugged country. Stylistically, the artists in the Group were indebted to Post-Impressionism and Symbolism, recognizing their antecedents while they sought to modify their notions of "significant form" and colour analysis

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toward a bold method of pictorial expression. These formal modernist elements included a thick paint surface, pure and brilliant colour and an incorporation of design into a raw treatment of an unidealized landscape—especially when compared to nineteenth-century English and French landscape painting that carried over into the early cultural identity of Canada.

Compared to modernist painting elsewhere at the time, the Group's work can appear conservative. However, within a Canadian context the artists forged a new visual language that attempted to break free of traditional cultural ties. The Group's manner of painting was seen by many of their contemporaries as crude or rough, mimicking the raw form and palette of the wilderness. Using the untamed Canadian landscape as fuel for their artistic and nationalistic goals, the Group put forth a new perception of beauty, one that spoke of a new world, its possibility and its freedom.

The seven founding members of the Group included Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Franz Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and F.H. Varley. This initial artistic coalition was formed in Toronto between 1911 and 1913. All, including the independently wealthy Harris, worked as commercial artists at some point in their careers. Tom Thomson, another commercial artist, was included in the pre-Group circle, but his premature death in 1917 precluded his official membership in the Group. An avid outdoorsman, Thomson was significant to the Group in that he sparked an interest in painting the northern Ontario landscape, particularly in and around Algonquin Park.

The rough wilderness of the landscape, its raw, dramatic austerity, coupled with breathtaking colour and light, spoke far more directly of Canada for these artists than anything to be found in the cities or settled areas. For them, the north, a constant motif in earlier discussions of Canadian identity, found its first expression in the rocks, burnt land, trees, colour and light of Algonquin Park.

The fresh, "uncivilized" landscape of northern Canada became, for the Group and their proponents, synonymous with the promise of a young country.

In order to increase awareness of the importance of art for the development of Canada as a nation, the Group circulated their paintings across Canada during the 1920s (showing especially in western Canada, such as at the Vancouver Exhibition, in 1927 followed by exhibitions at the New Westminister Provincial Exhibition, in Edmonton and Calgary). The populist intent of their project is reflected in the words of Eric Brown, the director of the National Gallery of Canada at the time, who said, "a great country needs a great art." During this time the Group also wrote numerous nationalistic articles about art and their country, illustrated Canadian books, decorated public buildings, wrote poetry and designed stage sets.

In the mid-1920s the Group underwent a change in members. In 1926 Johnston left the Group and A.J. Casson filled his spot until the Group disbanded in 1933. Four years later, in 1930, the Group widened its scope by including Edwin Holgate from Montreal, and in 1932 L.L. FitzGerald from Winnipeg joined the Group to further the representation of other provinces.

The mythology built up around the Canadian wilderness by the members of the Group ran parallel with developments in literature, poetry and politics that sought to identify Canada with the North and a nationalism based on the land. The identification with the land has been one reason, amongst others, for their continued popularity and success.

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The first Canadian work of art purchased by the Vancouver Art Gallery was a landscape by A.Y. Jackson in 1932, and later Harris gave several works by himself and other members to the Gallery. The Group of Seven has an important, if modest, presence in the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection and is significantly present in several private collections in the community. This selection of work supplements the holdings of the Gallery with a group of excellent canvases drawn from Vancouver collections and gives an opportunity for the public to see works that were predominantly collected in the east.

Melanie O'Brian and Ian Thom

Further Reading

Arthur Lismer: Paintings, 1913-1949. Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1950.

Darroch, Lois. *A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer.* Toronto: Merritt, 1981.

Grigor, Angela Nairne. *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

McLeish, John. *September Gale: A Study of Arthur Lismer of the Group of Seven.* Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1955.

Reid, Dennis. *The Later Work of Arthur Lismer.* Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985.

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951. September 26, 1951 - October 14, 1951.

100 Years of Canadian Art. September - November 1974.

Canadian Pictures, 1951. December 4, 1982 - March 20, 1983.

Images for the World. April 12, 1986 - May 19, 1986.

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

Vancouver Collects: The Group of Seven. October 20, 2001 - January 20, 2002.

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

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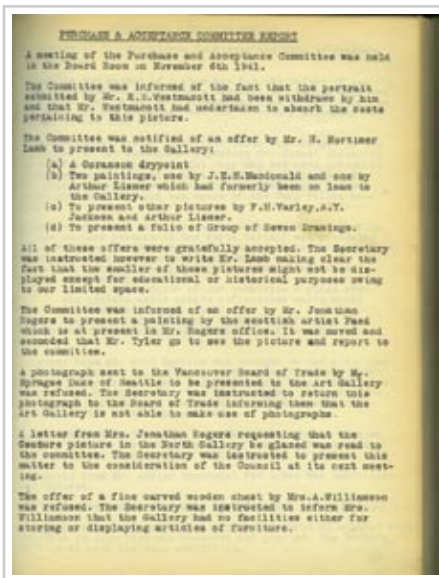
Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

University of British Columbia Fine Art Gallery, Vancouver. 1953.

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

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. 1959.

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



Archival History

Purchase & Acceptance Committee Report

Acquisition Record
1941-11-06

[transcription]

PURCHASE & ACCEPTANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

A meeting of the Purchase and Acceptance Committee was held in the Board Room on November 6th 1941.

The Committee was notified of an offer by Mr. H. Mortimer Lamb to present to the Gallery:

- a) A Goranson drypoint
- b) Two paintings, one by J.E.H. Macdonald and one by Arthur Lismer which had formerly been on loan to the Gallery.
- c) To present other pictures by F.H. Varley, A.Y. Jackson and Arthur Lismer.
- d) To present a folio of Group of Seven Drawings.

All of these offers were gratefully accepted. The Secretary was instructed however to write Mr. Lamb making clear the fact that the smaller of these pictures might not be displayed except for educational or historical purposes owing to our limited space.

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