

Henrietta Mabel May

Autumn in the Laurentians

oil on canvas
61.5 cm x 76.3 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery,
Founders' Fund
VAG 32.6



Photo: Tomas Svab, Vancouver Art Gallery

Henrietta Mabel May

Autumn in the Laurentians

Artist's Biography

Nationality: Canadian

Born: 1877-09-11, Montreal, Quebec

Died: 1971-10-08

Born in Westmount, Montreal, the daughter of Edward and Evelyn Henrietta May, she attended public and private schools in Montreal and Moncton, N.B. She had an early interest in drawing and began painting landscapes and people at the age of twelve. At the age of twenty-five she entered the classes of William Brymner at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1909-1912) where she received valued instruction and encouragement from him. It was during this study that she was awarded scholarships for two years to continue at the school. She was quick to reveal her feeling of gratitude towards Brymner throughout her career.

After completing her course in Montreal she went abroad to study in France with a fellow student, Emily Coonan. In Paris they spent their time sketching and visiting numerous exhibitions and museums. From there they travelled with several other artists to Northern France, Belgium and Holland. Later she visited London, Edinburgh and Glasgow. From her sojourn in Europe she came under the spell of the Impressionists, particularly the work of Monet, Renoir and Matisse.

She found an abundance of subject matter in the streets of Montreal, the banks of the St. Lawrence River and the rolling hills of the Laurentians. In 1916 she was elected an Associate of the Royal Canadian Academy and in 1918 painted several canvases for the Canadian War Memorials of women making shells.

By 1920 there was a thriving community of women artists in Montreal all of whom had studied under William Brymner. They banded together to share studio space on Beaver Hall Hill. There were two men artists with them, Randolph Hewton and Edwin Holgate. The foursome of May, Hewton, Holgate and Newton discovered the building where they were to work under the name of the Beaver Hall Hill Group. Later they disbanded for lack of funds. Mabel May painted with A.Y. Jackson, Mr. & Mrs. Newton, Edwin Holgate and the Gagnons at Baie St. Paul during the winter of 1924.

By 1925 her canvases began to reveal the influence of the Group of Seven as in "Melting Snow". In 1933 she became a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters. She continued to make trips in Quebec until her appointment as supervisor of children's classes at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1938. Her excellent teaching methods filled her students with great enthusiasm and some became outstanding Canadian artists.

In 1947 she returned to Montreal and for the next three years was active there. In 1950 she decided to retire to Vancouver and held a retrospective show and sale of one hundred of her paintings at the Dominion Gallery. She died in 1971 at the age of eighty-seven.

Source: MacDonald, Colin S. *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists*. Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1967.

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Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian

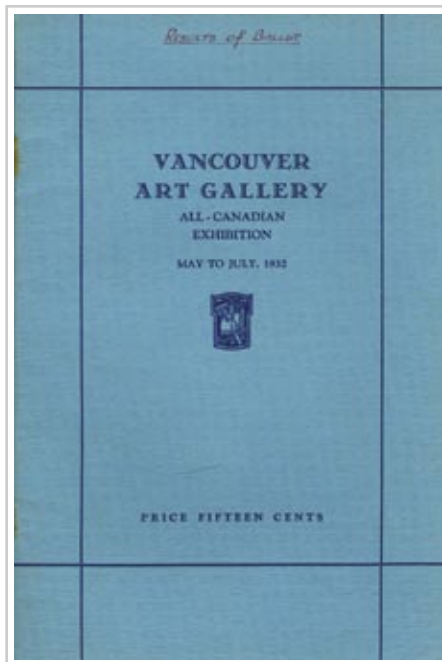
Training: Studied with William Brymner at the School of Art Association in Montreal

Group: Royal Canadian Art Academy, Canadian War Memorials, Canadian Group of Painters, Beaver Hall Hill Group; 19th century; 20th century

Peers: James Wilson Morrice; Randolph Hewton; Edwin Holgate; Lilia Newton

Provenance: purchased from W. Scott and Sons, Montreal, in 1932

Subject: landscape



Bibliography

Vancouver Art Gallery: All-Canadian Exhibition

Publication
1932

[transcription of excerpt]

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY
ALL CANADIAN EXHIBITION
MAY TO JULY, 1932

Price 15 Cents

Vancouver Art Gallery
All-Canadian Exhibition
May to July 1932

Judging Committee

Willie Dalton (Chairman)
H.A. Stone
H. Mortimer Lamb
J.W.G MacDonald
G.L. Thornton Sharp
J. Vanderpant
W.P. Weston

FOREWARD

In arranging the All-Canadian Exhibition, the aim of the Exhibition committee has been to gather from all parts of Canada a collection of pictures and sculpture that shall be representative of all that is best in Canadian Art, both past and present. Artists resident in British Columbia have contributed their quota and the Judging committee has endeavored to ensure that the work submitted shall have every opportunity for display side by side with works of art drawn from all parts of the Dominion. The Committee desires to express its sincere thanks to the Directors of the National Gallery of Canada, to Mr. E. Wyley Grier, President of the Royal Canadian Academy and to the other friends of the Gallery for their work in selecting pictures from Eastern Canada, and for the co-operation and advice so generously afforded.

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Before the Exhibition closes, it is anticipated that the Founders will select certain pictures as a nucleus of a Permanent Collection of Canadian Art.

Willie Dalton
Chairman

81 Autumn in the Laurentians Mabel May, A.R.C.A.



Canadian Pictures, 1951

Publication
1982

[transcription]

The Vancouver Art Gallery

CANADIAN PICTURES, 1951

December 4, 1951 - March 20, 1951

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]

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Further Reading

The Beaver Hall Hill Group. Ottawa: National Gallery, n.d..

Duval, Paul. *Canadian Impressionism*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990.

Gaze, Delia ed. *The Dictionary of Women Artists*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997.

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

All-Canadian Exhibition. May - July, 1932.

Opening the New Vancouver Art Gallery, 1951: Canadian Paintings from our Permanent Collection. September 26 - October 14, 1951.

Mabel May: Retrospective. February 5, 1952 - March 2, 1952.

Exploring the Collection: Canadian Landscape. February 13, 1993 - November 22, 1993.

James Wilson Morrice and his Contemporaries. July 15, 1998 - January 10, 1999.

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

Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

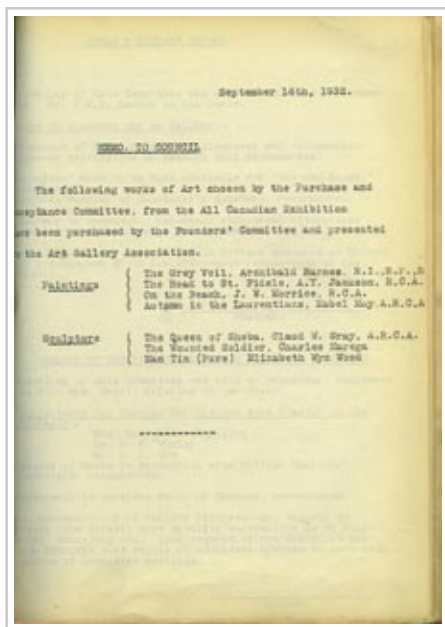
Art Gallery of Victoria, Victoria. *Canadian Paintings*. 1953.

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. June 1959.

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

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Archival History

Council Memo
Acquisition Record
1932-09-13

[transcription]

September 16th, 1932.

Memo to Council

The following works of Art chosen by the Purchase and Acceptance Committee, from the All Canadian Exhibition have been purchased by the Founders' Committee and presented to the Art Gallery Association.

Paintings:

The Grey Veil, Archibald Barnes, R.I.R.P.R.
The Road to St. Fidele, A.Y. Jackson, R.C.A.
On the Beach, J.W. Morrice, R.C.A.
Autumn in the Laurentians, Mabel May, A.R.C.A.

Sculpture:

The Queen of Sheba, Claud W. Gray, A.R.C.A.
The Wounded Soldier, Charles Marega
Man Tin (Pure) Elizabeth Wyn Wood



Council Minutes
Acquisition Record
1933-05-08

[transcription of excerpt]

Minutes from Acquisitions Committee Meetings:
Report of Purchase and Acceptance committee
Annual Meeting of the Vancouver Art Gallery Association
Monday May 8 1933

2.

From the All-Canadian Exhibition held last Spring the Founders purchased 4 pictures and 3 pieces of sculpture.

Eight purchases have also been made by the Founders from the recent Exhibition of British prints? These purchases are not yet on view.

On the recommendation of its representatives in Eastern Canada the Founders have also purchased one oil painting by Robert Gagen.

Following is a full list of all works acquired by the Gallery during the year—

PURCHASES

TITLE: In the Laurentians
ARTIST: Mabel May, A.R.C.A.
PURCHASED BY FOUNDERS

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