

Walter J. Phillips
Karlukwees B.C., 1929

colour woodcut on paper
28.1 cm x 33.1 cm

Collection of the Vancouver Art
Gallery, Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.74



Walter J. Phillips

Karlukees B.C., 1929

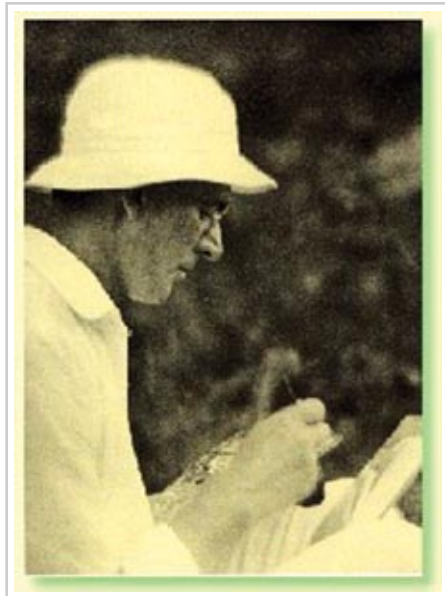


Image source:
<http://www.sharecom.ca/phillips/default2.html>

Artist's Biography

Nationality: British-born Canadian
Born: 1884-10-25, Barton-upon-Humber, England
Died: 1963-07-05

Walter Joseph Phillips was born 1884 at Barton-on-Humber in Lincolnshire, England, the son of Reverend John Phillips, a Methodist minister. In his teens, he attended the Birmingham School of Art once a week, studying under Edward R. Taylor. He went to South Africa for a few years in the hope of earning enough money there to be able to study art in Paris, but returned with little more than he left with. By 1908 he had worked as a commercial artist in Manchester and London, then from 1908 to 1911 served as art master at Bishop Woodworth School in Salisbury, England.

In 1911, he held his first solo show in Salisbury which was both critically and financially successful. Eventually, he and his wife Gladys Pitcher, whom he had married in December 1910, decided to emigrate to Canada, arriving in Winnipeg in June, 1913. Shortly after his arrival, a fellow artist he met taught him etching technique and sold him his tools.

From 1915 to 1918, he produced etchings in very small editions, subsequently switching to colour woodcut prints, a medium he found more to his liking. During the summers of 1917 and 1919, Phillips taught at the University of Wisconsin, and by then his works had commanded national and international attention. By 1923 he had published forty-two colour woodcuts, and in a burst of productivity between 1926 and 1928 he produced thirty-nine. By now, he had well-established his own pattern of making woodcuts: a graphite sketch; next, a finished watercolour; another sketch to compose the woodcut, and then the final print.

Phillips was so highly regarded that during the Great Depression he was one of a handful of artists who could live off the sale of his paintings and woodcuts. From 1925 to 1935 his subjects were mainly from the Prairies, but by 1946 most of his subjects were from the Rocky Mountains. He also continued to be a prolific book illustrator. In 1940 he became a staff member of the Banff Summer School of Fine Arts and in 1941 moved to Calgary to take up the position of instructor at the Institute of Technology and Art, where he stayed until 1949. In 1953 he moved to Banff where he lived in a house on Tunnell Mountain.

By 1958 Phillips' eyesight began failing, and in 1960 he retired to Victoria. In 1963, Walter Joseph Phillips died in Victoria at the age of 78. His ashes were scattered in the Alberta mountains he had loved so much and which had provided him with so many of his subjects.

Source: "Walter J. Phillips," *Ask Art*. February 16, 2006. <http://www.askart.com>

Artistic Context

Nationality: British-born Canadian

Peers: Cyril H. Barraud

Group: Printmaking; Society of Canadian Painters-Etchers; 19th century; 20th century

Provenance: Acquired from an Anonymous donor in 1986

Subject: landscape; Native culture;

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Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Walter J. Phillips
Totem Pole (Mamalilicoola B.C.); Mamalilicoola B.C., 1928
woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Vancouver Art Gallery Founders' Fund
VAG 35.3

Walter J. Phillips
Planting a Zanuk, 1930
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.72

Walter J. Phillips
Tunnel Mountain, 1944
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.73

Walter J. Phillips
Jim King's Wharf, Alert Bay, B.C., 1927
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.75

Walter J. Phillips
Praire Elevator, 1943
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.76

Walter J. Phillips
Beaver Lodge, 1944
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.77

Walter J. Phillips
Bredon Village,
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.78

Walter J. Phillips
Gerran's Bay, Pender Harbour, B.C., 1935
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.79

Walter J. Phillips
Gimli Harbour,
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.80

Walter J. Phillips
The Waterfront, Alert Bay, B.C., 1928
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.81

Walter J. Phillips
Karlukwees B.C., 1929

Walter J. Phillips
Mountain Larch, 1926
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.82

Walter J. Phillips
The Dock, 1922
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.83

Walter J. Phillips
A Gloucester Village, 1926
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.84

Walter J. Phillips
Above Lake Louise, 1945
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.85

Walter J. Phillips
Fall, Lake Winnipeg, 1919
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.86

Walter J. Phillips
Mount Nicholas, 1940
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.87

Walter J. Phillips
Tree Shadow on Snow, 1922
colour woodcut on paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.88

Walter J. Phillips
Pom Poms, 1928
colour woodcut on japanese tissue paper
Anonymous Gift
VAG 86.89

Walter J. Phillips
Planting a Zunuk, 1930
relief print on paper
Gift of the Lewis family
VAG 92.36.10

Walter J. Phillips
The Source of the Bow, 1936
wood engraving on tissue paper
Gift of Mr. Paul Ziff
VAG 94.11.1

Walter J. Phillips
Karlukees B.C., 1929

Walter J. Phillips
Untitled (Grain Elevators, Edmonton), 1930
watercolour and pencil on paper
Gift of Dr. Abraham and Mrs. Naomi Greenberg
VAG 94.45.6

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Dug-out, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.1

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; The hoh-hok House Posts at Karlukees, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.2

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; House of the Gulls, Karlukees, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.3

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Zunuk, Karlukees, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.4

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Shacks on the Beach, Karlukees, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.5

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Ruin, Tsatsisnukomi, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.6

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Thunder Bird, Alert Bay, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.7

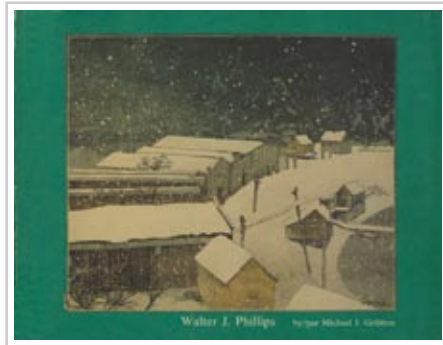
Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; The Clothes-line, Mamalilicoola, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.8

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; The Floating dock, Mamalilicoola, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.9

Walter J. Phillips
An Essay in Woodcuts; Community Houses, Mamalilicoola, 1930
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 97.50.10

Walter J. Phillips

Karlukwees B.C., 1929



Bibliography

Walter J. Phillips

Publication
1978

[transcription of excerpt]

38. Walter J. Phillips, in about 1942, holding up his famous colour wood-cut of *Karlukwees*.

Karlukwees, B.C. Phillips did [a] number of renderings of *Karlukwees, B.C.* The vivid summer sketch (c. 1926; fig. 39), of the village was to inspire the famous colour wood-cut (see cover). A larger copy in watercolour of the original sketch (fig. 40) was intended as a finished work, but lacks the spontaneity and sparkle of the smaller version. (Small water-colour and graphite sketch, 20.4 x 23.7 cm, The Crabb Family, Winnipeg; Larger watercolour, 41.3 x 48.0 cm, The Crabb Family, Winnipeg.)



CHAPTER VIII

Working Procedures
Copying

"Copying is an art in itself..."

The large watercolour, *Karlukwees B.C.* (c. 1927; fig. 40), mentioned in the last chapter, was done from the same position as the print and the small watercolour sketch. Its size and general appearance leave no doubt that it was intended to be a finished work, but it lacks both spontaneity and sparkle. It leads one to believe that it is simply a worked-up copy of the smaller sketch. Phillips did make copies of some of his works, but he was also well aware of the difficulties inherent in this practice:

Copying is an art in itself, demanding the greatest technical ability, especially in watercolour. However well done, the copy invariably lacks that nascent, ineffable, but definite quality, provided by the furious enthusiasm with which an original is created, an essential spontaneity that defies reproduction. It is present in sketches, and accounts for the common belief that the best watercolours are those finished on the spot.

That belief is a fallacy of course, Cotman's and Turner's paintings possess this charm, and more besides, and a few of them were completed out of doors. I have never succeeded in copying one of my won paintings satisfactorily, for the emotion which caused and justified its creation has long been dissipated. Such arduous and thankless labour is done in cold blood, but it is necessary when, for example, a good original is marred by accident. There is the process of enlarging a watercolour, which actually amounts to copying its good points and improving its bad ones, and is interesting proportionally as the latter increase. Enlargements are made mostly for exhibitions.

A tempera painting, *Karlukwees* (c. 1928), also exists, again done from the same angle, but it, too, lacks vivacity, and Phillips no doubt executed it merely for the sake of experimenting with the tempera medium. He fully realized the implications of changing from one medium to another, but at the same time he welcomed the challenge:



Walter J. Phillips *Karlukwees B.C., 1929*



Not often does an artist excel in both mediums. When he employs both, his style in the one is apt to incline towards that in the other, and he fails to make the most of either.

The fact is that a different mental and visual outlook is required, governed entirely by material, that is, by the pigment, brushes, and surfaces used. It is hard to readapt oneself. At the same time I hate to be frozen out.

There are two other watercolours of Karlukwees which were painted from a point farther to the right of the village than in the works previously discussed. Both differ in content. In one of them, *Myth of the Thunderbird* (c.1927), Phillips added figures and boats to the composition. This greatly contributes to the sense of excitement and frenzied activity which the picture generates, as the villagers become aware of the presence of the Thunderbird, which appears to be emerging, literally, from their fire on the beach.

The second watercolour (c.1927) is without either figures or boats. It reflects the calmness of the colour wood-cut, but in no way does it achieve that sense of suspended quietude which the gently falling snow creates in the print. Phillips's various interpretations of Karlukwees are of particular interest, because they reveal how an inspirational location could act as a stimulus, and result in his experimenting with a wide diversity of techniques and subject-matter:

Karlukwees provided many subjects for painting. In fact never have I seen a more delectable sketching ground. We had penetrated an arm of the sea, the open sea seemed far away for it flowed only in narrow channels, between an immense number of islands. I regretted leaving the coast, and I long to return.

Further Reading

Allison, Carlyle. *The Art of W.J. Phillips*. Toronto: Hudson's Bay Company, 1970.

Gibbon, Michael J. *Walter J. Phillips: A Selection of his Works and Thoughts*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1978.

Hawker, Ronald W. *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003.

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Walter J. Phillips
Karlukwees B.C., 1929

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

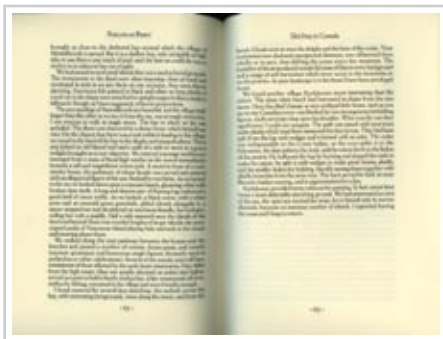
LAND/SCAPE. September 19, 1986 - November 16, 1986.

Paper Buildings: Architecture as Subject. January 8, 1994 - May 15, 1994.

75 Years of Collecting: First Nations: Myths and Realities. May 6, 2006 - August 27, 2006.

Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. *Walter J. Phillips*. 1978



Archival History

Note on Karlukwees
Miscellaneous History
1982

[transcription]

We found another village—Karlukwees—more interesting than the others. The clean white beach had borrowed its shape from the new moon. Here the chief's house—a very civilized little house, such as you see in any Canadian town—was flanked by two incongruous forbidding figures, each carrying a keg upon his shoulder. What exactly was their significance I could not imagine. The path was paved with enormous cedar planks which must have measured five feet across. They had been split from the log with wedges and trimmed with an adze. The cedar was indispensable to the Coast Indian, as the coco-palm is to the Polynesian, the date-palm to the Arab, and the canoe-birch to the Indian of the prairie. He hollowed the log by burning and shaped the ends to make his canoe; he split it with wedges to make great beams, planks, and the smaller shakes for building, literally sewing them together with pliable branches from the same tree. The bark served for fuel; its inner fibres for basket weaving, and its pigmentation for a dye.

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Walter J. Phillips
Karlukwees B.C., 1929



Acquisitions Justification

Acquisition Record
1986

[transcription]

WALTER J PHILLIPS, 1884-1963

See attached list.

Woodcuts

W.J. Phillips has been given recognition as one of Canada's important contributors to printmaking. Born in South Africa in 1884, he did not pursue woodcuts and colour-block printing until later in his career, when in 1924-25, he had travelled to Canada and spent some time in England. His association with the Japanese printmaker, Ureshibaea, and admiration of both Japanese printers and English watercolourists is clear.

The print Karlukwees offered here as part of the donation, strongly shows the Japanese influence, although the subject matter is a fishing station on the B.C. coast.

The prints in this donation, which assist in determining value, are good impressions of unfaded colour, and signed in most instances. Although Phillips did do portfolios, most of these prints being offered are what one can describe as individual editions. Initially a selection of woodcuts of B.C. subject matter was pulled from the possible donation, but a decision was made to put forth all of the prints as they covered a wider time frame and greater opportunity to assess Phillips' work.

Phillips, who died in Victoria, B.C. in 1963, has also established himself as a watercolourist and writer. The National Gallery of Canada toured an exhibition of his work in 1977, and books, *The Tranquility and the Turbulence* by Roger Boulet, and *Phillips in Print* by Maria Tippet and Douglas Cole, have been published (1981-82).

Phillips first exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1946. We have what is considered a rare print, *Totem Poles Manalilicolla*, B.C. 1935, already in our collection.

Many of the drawings for these woodcuts are in the

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Glenbow-Alberta collection. Phillips is also well represented with woodcuts in the collections of the Edmonton Art Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Victoria Art Gallery, and the National Gallery of Canada.

LFW/dem

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Karlukwees B.C., 1929

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