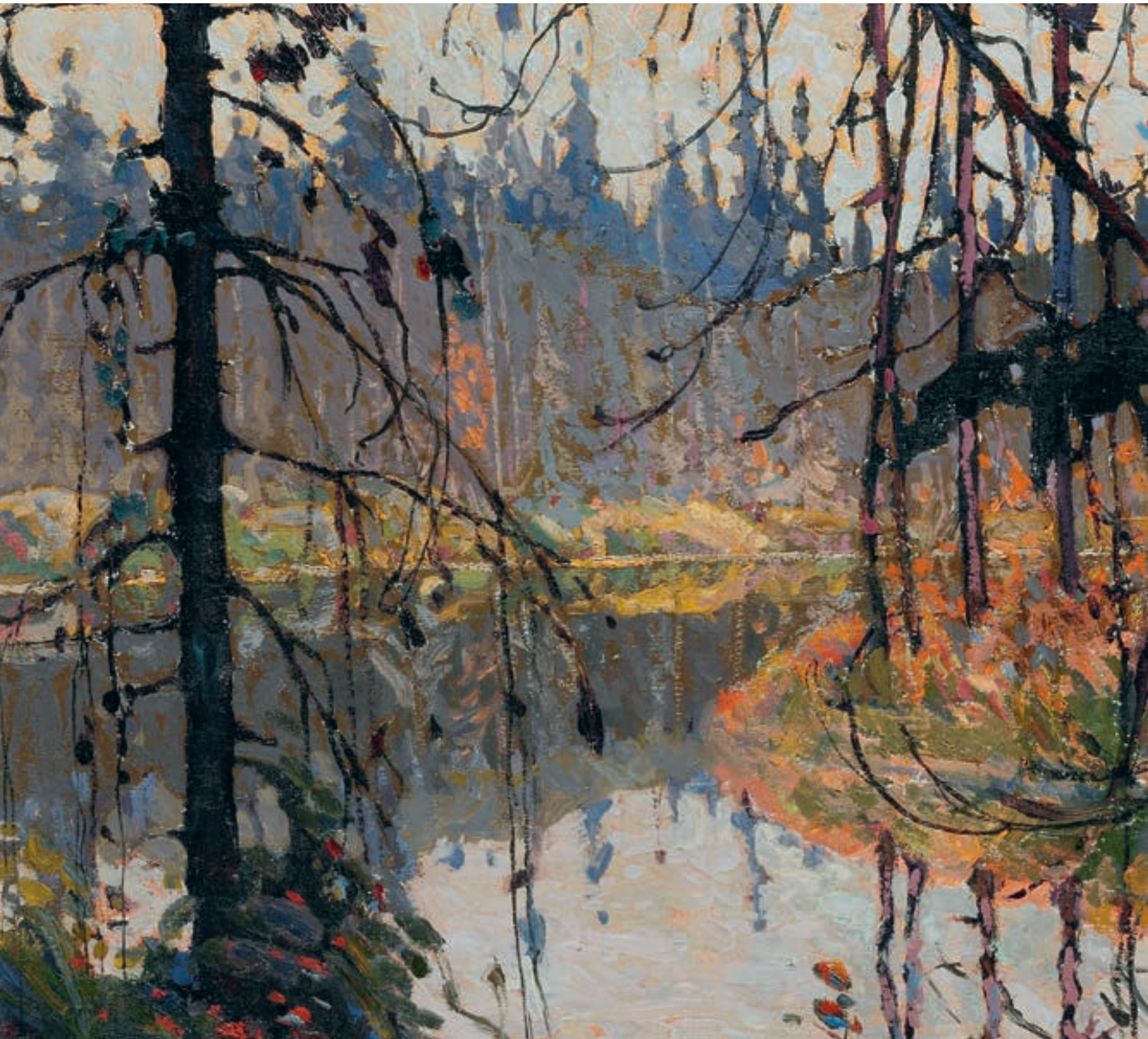


Tangled



Woods



Artists associated with the Group of Seven spent much of their time in the woods, camping and sketching on extended painting trips—in tangled territory, not always easily accessible. They found ample inspiration in Ontario's vast forests, in their characteristic play of light and shadows and glorious seasonal colors. Tom Thomson depicted deep woods with dense foliage and a twisted screen of trees in his *Northern River* (winter 1914–15) to conjure up a sense of silence and pristine isolation. Lawren Harris's anthropomorphic silhouetted trees in changing light, in turn, evoke a primordial territory filled with potential in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920). A close-up view of the water's edge in his *Beaver Pond* (1921) reveals dead tree trunks, partially submerged, standing sentinel on the margins of impenetrable, dark woods.

In contrast, Arthur Lismer and Franklin Carmichael painted resplendent trees dappled with sunlight and infused with vivid colors as an offering of dazzling optimism. F. H. Varley's singular work *Magic Tree* (1924) is a portrait of a swirl of sinuous branches entwined around a thick trunk engulfed in a bed of fallen autumn leaves. A small, rousing painting, it is

infused with power and emotion, conveying the artist's vivacious vision of Canadian woods.

Collectively, these canvases reveal the artists' search for new ways of expressing their relationships to place and their exuberance for simplified forms and energetic colors. They chose to focus on the stirring beauty of Ontario's majestic trees and forests, despite the relentless presence of the logging industry. Spending time in the midst of tangled woods, they experimented with fundamentally formal concerns of painting and created a unique visual language that proves essential to understanding the development of the modernist painting tradition in Canada.

Georgiana Uhlyarik



Tangled Woods



Lawren Harris
Beaver Pond, 1921
81.7 × 102 cm

Lawren Harris
Beaver Swamp, Algoma, 1920
120.7 × 141 cm

Emily



Carr



Celebrated for her dense paintings of forest interiors from the 1930s, Emily Carr spent the early decades of her career painting the Indigenous villages of the Northwest Coast. Having traveled from her hometown of Victoria, British Columbia, to Alaska, she was fascinated with their monumental carvings, later on writing extensively about her experiences. Carr repainted the views she found particularly inspiring, such as Cumshewa on Haida Gwaii, the site of her powerful painting *Big Raven* (1931). Other times, she used photographs as a source of her compositions, such as *Blunden Harbour* (ca. 1930). These pictures reveal a foundational shift in Carr's painting. While in the 1910s she had painted Indigenous villages and carvings with the vibrant colors of Post-Impressionism and Fauvism absorbed during her time studying in England and France, these later canvases exhibit the confident fluidity and form that articulate her own distinctive painting vocabulary.

Carr's preoccupation with Indigenous art and people is radically different from the work of artists associated with the Group of Seven who deliberately evacuated their landscapes of any Indigenous presence. Yet, her attitude was shaped by her Victorian upbringing. Despite her stated admiration, Carr's

paintings of this period are fittingly viewed today as indicative of colonial thinking, and of participation in the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples as dictated by restrictive Canadian laws, such as the Indian Act, intended to rupture and destroy life in the villages.

It was her friendship and artistic exchange with Lawren Harris in the 1930s, after a fourteen-year hiatus from painting, that transformed Carr's work, along with her own maturity as an artist on a spiritual quest. "What I am after is out there in the woods," Carr declared.¹ In luscious paintings such as *Wood Interior* (1929–30), *Western Forest* (ca. 1931), and her enigmatic *Forest* (ca. 1930–39), Carr's commitment to evoking the inner life force of the old-growth temperate rainforest reveals a profound spirituality and connection to the land.

Georgiana Uhlyarik

¹—Emily Carr, letter to Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), March 2, 1937, NGC files, Ottawa.



Emily Carr
Red Tree, ca. 1938
91.8 × 61.2 cm

Emily Carr
Guyasdoms D'Sonoqua, ca. 1930
100.3 × 65.4 cm

Emily Carr



Land vs



Landscape



All official members of the Group of Seven were white men, some raised in England. The few women who exhibited alongside the Group were also of European descent. During their years of training in Europe, many of these artists had absorbed the various trends in art there, yet they all shared the idea of wanting to create genuinely Canadian art. They were further united by their social and cultural context. Completely absent, however, both in their art and in the era in general, was an awareness of the colonial perspective inscribed within their images of Canadian landscapes. This remained a blind spot in the art of the time. The search for a visual representation of Canada was also a process of exclusion. The paintings would construct a wilderness that was quite often not there, for this supposedly uninhabited landscape was, and always had been, home to many Indigenous peoples. The essentially European concept of an aesthetically ordered landscape, be it sublime, picturesque, or romantic, is opposed by Indigenous connection to land as one of kinship—humans are bound with the land and are in relation to all nonhuman beings. Unlike Eurocentric notions of human ownership and dominance of the land, the Indigenous world places land “at the root of all our relations” (Caroline Monnet). It is the ancestral land that settlers annexed

and from which Indigenous communities were removed through resettlement.

This chapter bands together positions of Indigenous critique of knowledge informed by colonialism. Time periods are presented using the example of a region in British Columbia. Thus, different voices reveal how the depiction and representation of this region has changed. A famous painting by Emily Carr is titled *Blunden Harbour* (ca. 1930). It was painted after a photograph by Charles F. Newcombe and depicts three monumental totem poles. The same place, with the actual name Ba'as, is the setting of the first silent film by a white director with an Indigenous cast, *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914), as well as the documentary *Blunden Harbour* (1951). We trace the shift in narrative perspective to the present day, to *Mobilize* (2015) by the Algonquin-French artist Caroline Monnet; and in Lisa Jackson's film *How a People Live* (2013), we reappraise the traumata of an Indigenous community following the Indian Act. These films and the photographs by Jeff Thomas—all works by Indigenous artists—form a counternarrative to the landscapes of the Group of Seven.

Edward S. Curtis

*In the Land of the Head Hunters /
In the Land of the War Canoes*, 1914
Film (restoration with original
musical score, tinted, sound,
66 min.)

The silent film set among the Kwakwaka'wakw, an Indigenous people who live around the Queen Charlotte Strait on the coast of British Columbia in the northwest of Canada, is a fictionalized love story set amidst warring clans. Written and directed by the American photographer Edward S. Curtis, with George Hunt as his Kwakwaka'wakw advisor,¹ it is considered to be the first film with an entirely Indigenous cast. Stanley Hunt and Maggie Frank star in the principle roles. Hunt's second wife, Francine, a noblewoman from the 'Nakwaxda'xw nation, familiarly known as Tsak'wani, made the robes, advised on details, and played several roles. George Hunt's grandchildren Margaret, Frank, and Robert Wilson, as well as Helen Wilson Knox, were also given parts. The elaborate production was filmed on Kwakwaka'wakw territory and was intended for a broad audience. Its reception has focused predominately on its perceived "documentary" aspects, which is why it is quite frequently (mis)understood as an ethnographic document.

Despite the criticism of Curtis, who was accused in particular of stylizing and historicizing Indigenous peoples and subjecting them to the romantic cliché of a declining "primitive" culture, the film provides, as a result of its photographic quality, insights into the culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw that had otherwise barely been possible. The film



Land vs Landscape



includes totems, war canoes, masks, and a potlatch, a ceremonial feast banned from 1885 to 1951 as part of the Indian Act. The filmed potlatch was celebrated specifically for the production. The anti-potlatch ban was otherwise rigidly enforced; eight years after the filming, twenty-two Kwakwaka'wakw people went to jail for participating in a potlatch.²

The film had limited success at the box office and was then long thought to have been lost. It was rediscovered in the late 1960s, reedited in 1972 on the initiative of Bill Holm and George Quimby, in consultation with some of the Indigenous people who had originally worked on the film. It was subsequently supplied with a soundtrack by a large group of Kwakwaka'wakw, who had gathered in the auditorium of the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria, and then released in 1973 under the title *In the Land of the War Canoes*. The original version was reconstructed in 2008 with the revival of the original orchestral score.³ The original film title and intertitles were restored, and color tinting was re-created from rediscovered footage.

Martina Weinhart

¹—Before working with Edward S. Curtis, George Hunt had been the Kwakwaka'wakw guide and interpreter for Franz Boas, the founder of the field of ethnological field research.

²—Bill Holm, “Foreword,” in *Return to the Land of the Head Hunters: Edward S. Curtis, the Kwakwaka'wakw, and the Making of Modern Cinema*, ed. Brad Evans and Aaron Glass (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), p. xvii.

³—See Evans and Glass, *Return to the Land of the Head Hunters*.



Georg Hunt (with megaphone),
Edward S. Curtis, and actors
filming *In the Land of the Head
Hunters*, 1914

Kwakwaka'wakw dancers in 1910
simulating a Hamatsa winter
ceremonial dance, with bird masks
related to the Baxbaxwalanuksiwe
myth

Dancers of the Nan (Grizzly Bear)
dance, Kwan'wala (Thunderbird)
dance, and Hamasalal (Wasp) dance
appear in a Kwakwaka'wakw "cap-
turing the bride" ceremony, ca. 1914

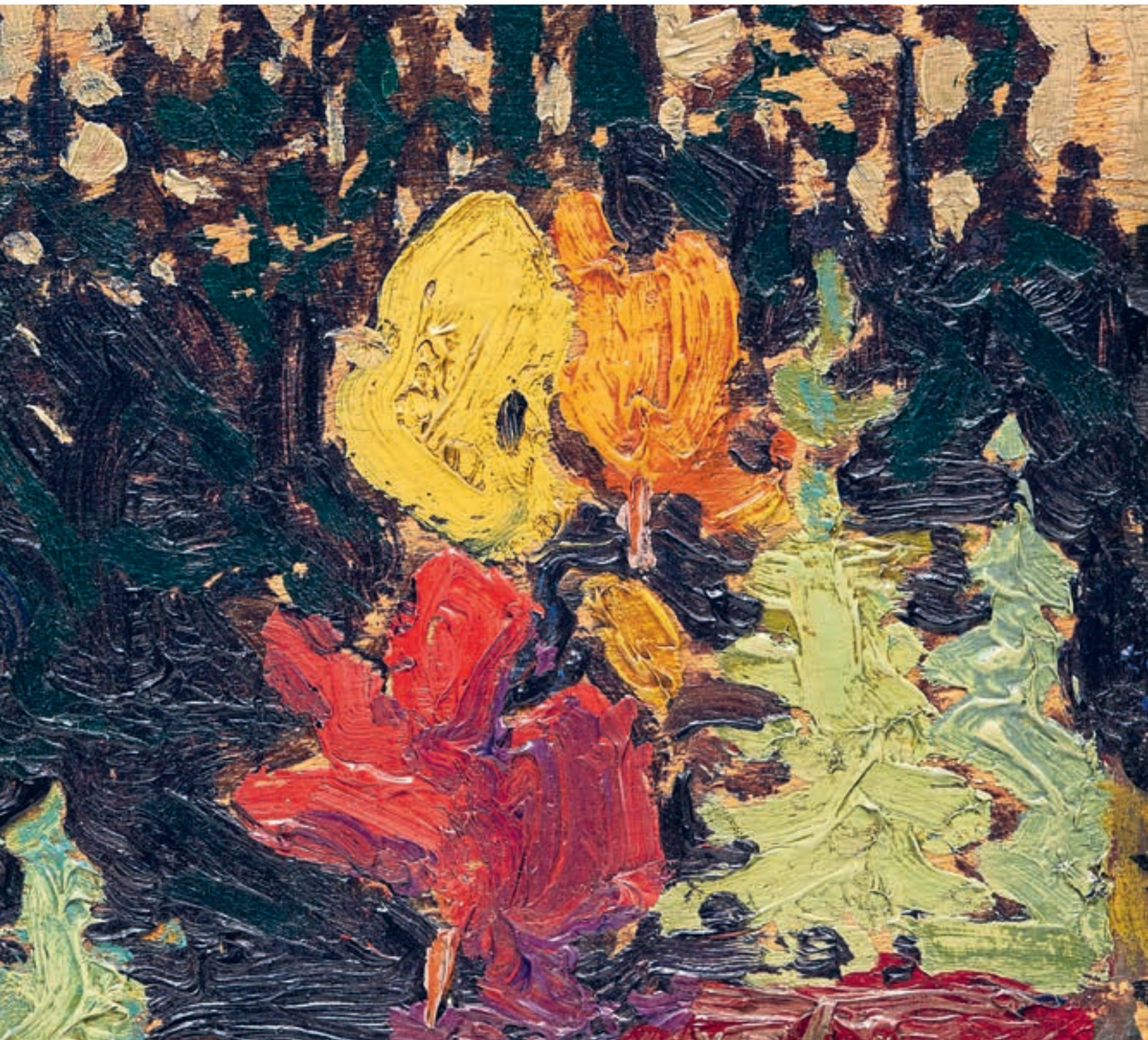
Land vs Landscape



Tom Thomson



Sketches



Tom Thomson achieved in his oil sketches a virtuosity and expressiveness that was unequalled in his Canadian contemporaries. He was regarded by his peers as the pioneer of a new, unconventional kind of landscape painting that is most apparent in his sketches. In the space of just five years (1912–17), Thomson created more than 300 oil sketches, only several of which he would rework as larger canvases.¹ The small-scale sketches on panel or cardboard were produced during extended stays in Algonquin Provincial Park. He would intensely draw and paint views he found compelling. Accordingly, his subjects range from dense forests and open lakes to night scenes with lone moose. From 1917 on, he would refer to the studies as “records,” his way of documenting his surroundings in a journal-like manner.

As a matter of principle, Thomson painted the sketches outdoors. He had a wooden sketch box for this purpose into which multiple painting supports could be inserted to dry. At once easel and palette, the box was balanced on the knees while painting. The practical size allowed him to carry it on his backpack or in a canoe on trips farther afield.

Thomson would capture his subjects using quick lines and liberally applied paint, usually in just a few different colors. *Tamarack* (fall 1915), for example, is divided into four horizontal color fields at first glance. The impression of a row of trees standing out against the rest of the painting in vibrant orange is created only through jagged, vertical brushstrokes. *A Rapid* (fall 1915), by contrast, is a constellation of so many wild strokes and dabs of thick paint that a motif is only evident from a certain distance. The unpainted support shows through in many places and is also used to contour the pictorial elements. While his canvases are composed and ordered, the sketches have an intensity and immediacy in the way in which they play with variations in color and form. Their innovative approaches almost reach abstraction, which reveals an incredible modernity.

Rebecca Herlemann

¹—Joan Murray, *Tom Thomson: Catalogue Raisonné*, <https://www.tomthomsoncatalogue.org> (accessed May 30, 2020).



Tom Thomson
Pine Tree, summer 1916
21.6 × 26.7 cm

Tom Thomson
Wild Cherry Trees in Blossom, spring 1915
21.6 × 26.7 cm

Tom Thomson Sketches





Tom Thomson
Tamarack, fall 1915
21.5 × 26.5 cm

Tom Thomson
Forest, October, fall 1915
21.3 × 26.9 cm

Tom Thomson Sketches





Mining



The industrialization of Canada was already undergoing a rapid boom at the end of the nineteenth century in the course of the second global wave of the Industrial Revolution. The mining of natural resources in particular accelerated the advent of a modern era that would guarantee the prosperity of society, while also signifying the shift from an agrarian to an industrial nation. Mining supplied industrial society with the raw materials of iron ore, copper, nickel, gold, and silver that it craved.

“This treasure-laden wilderness ... will inform our literature and art with a spirit of its own ... commerce and art are becoming allies,” wrote a prominent supporter of the Group of Seven.¹ The pictures of this altered landscape, of mines and mining towns, to some extent belie the notion that Canada was characterized above all by vast, isolated regions and unspoiled wilderness—a myth that the Group was often accused of creating. The real irony is found in the imaginary quality of this vision, for: “Wilderness and capitalist modernity in Canada went hand in hand.”²

Some pictures do actually reflect the complex role of art in the discrepancy between the myth of the wilderness and of industrialization. Yvonne McKague Housser captured the dreariness

of abandoned cobalt mines following the legendary Silver Rush. Franklin Carmichael depicted *A Northern Silver Mine* (1930) as an almost cheerful scene with clear lines and cold precision. Little of the much-vaunted belief in progress and the trust in an inexhaustible wealth of the wilderness can be seen in Lawren Harris's paintings *Miners' Houses*, *Glace Bay* (ca. 1925) and *Ontario Hill Town* (1926). The dramatic scenes, with their strong contrasts and plunging lines, instead call to mind the stage sets of early Expressionist films. Harris, who began his career in 1908 with street scenes of the poorer districts of Toronto, here found his way back to social issues. In April 1925, during the bitter coal mining strike, he visited Glace Bay in Nova Scotia, at times to report for the *Toronto Star*. His stylized, theatrical pictures go beyond that idyll, yet they also avoid depicting the living conditions of miners in a realistic way. One thing unites the different genres: just like the pictures of nature, of the mountains and forests, the industrialized landscapes are generally also uninhabited.

Martina Weinhart

1—Vincent Massey, "Art and Nationality in Canada," in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd series, XXIV (1930), p. Ixif.

2—John O'Brian, "Wild Art History," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 22.

Mining



Franklin Carmichael
A Northern Silver Mine, 1930
 101.5 × 121.2 cm

In his review of the Group of Seven's 1928 exhibition, the critic Fred Jacob wrote that Franklin Carmichael had "given up the purely decorative, in which he used to excel," choosing instead to interpret the "grim features of Canadian life," as evinced by *In the Nickel Belt* (p. 193), a work infused with "forbidding feeling."¹ Although Jacob was favorably commenting on the new direction in Carmichael's work, what he describes as the dark side of Canadian life was a key component of the nation's prosperity at the time. Indeed, the importance of mining was widely documented in a growing array of Canadian publications and promotional materials. Carmichael himself played a significant role in producing images promoting the country's advancing modernization and industrialization, both through his work at the advertising agency Grip Limited and, later, at the print company Sampson-Matthews. Yet in his paintings he offered a different view on the mining industry.

In the early twentieth century, mining in Canada epitomized industrial modernity, though the practice was also associated with greed, conflict, and environmental destruction.² Formed 1.85 billion years ago by the impact of an asteroid, the Sudbury Basin in Northern Ontario near Lake Huron is especially rich in metal deposits. It was here that large companies like the International Nickel Company of Canada and Falconbridge settled around 1900 to mine copper and nickel on a large scale. At the end of the 1920s,

Franklin Carmichael took several trips to this area and deftly captured the landscapes he found.

The artist chose an elevated point of view for his depictions of the region, which allows the viewer to gaze across smooth, rounded hills into the distance. Interventions in the landscape are evident only in a few elements. *In the Nickel Belt* shows a large plume of smoke rising from the distant smokestacks, yet the actual industrial site remains hidden. In *A Northern Silver Mine*, the mining towers and factories, grouped around a body of water, are quiet and deserted. The crystalline forms and sweeping view aestheticize a landscape into which the industry both blends and intrudes. The huge smoke cloud and the mining towers cut into the beautiful nature and offer some mild criticism of the impact on the environment in Carmichael's paintings.

Rebecca Herlemann

1—Fred Jacob, "In the Art Galleries," *Toronto Mail and Empire*, February 18, 1928, as quoted by Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto et al. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), p. 325, cat. 106.

2—See Rosemary Donegan, "Modernism and the Industrial Imagination: Copper Cliff and the Sudbury Basin," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 146.

Mining



Mining

