

# The Canadian Landscape

Comments on a touring exhibition organized by the Canadian High Commission Cultural Centre Gallery

Paintings selected from the Ontario Heritage Foundation Firestone Art Collection

It is only very rarely that we have the opportunity to organize an exhibition comprising works by many of Canada's most renowned twentieth-century artists. The idea for an exhibition that illustrates both the widely differing ways in which painters have depicted the landscape, as well as the immense variety of subject matter itself across the whole of Canada, was put to us in 1982 by Jack Firestone and his wife while they were on a visit to London. As a dedicated collector of Canadian art over the last thirty years, one of Dr Firestone's main areas of interest has been Canadian landscape painting. It is from this Collection that the present exhibition is drawn and we are most grateful to Dr Firestone and the Ontario Heritage Foundation – to which more than twelve

hundred works in the Collection were presented in 1972 – for their generosity in lending the thirty-three paintings in this exhibition.

We are grateful to Dr Firestone too for his introduction to the exhibition in our catalogue, in which he outlines the artistic development, main interests and preoccupations of each painter. Through personal acquaintance with many of them he gives fascinating insights into the artists as people, enabling us to understand the paintings themselves in more depth.

An extract from Dr Firestone's catalogue introduction follows. It includes his personal appreciations of some of the artists, giving us a unique and intimate view of the Canadian art world in this century.

Lawren Harris,  
*Algoma Country II*, 1923,  
oil on canvas



DR JACK FIRESTONE

Since Canada gained a degree of autonomy in 1867, the visual arts have gone through three stages. During the years 1867-1914 most Canadian painters, largely trained in London and Paris, painted like their European counterparts when they returned home; in the period 1919-39 a strong feeling of nationalism and the struggle to minimize European influences dominated the art scene; and from 1946 to the present day French and American influences contributed greatly to Canadian painters becoming increasingly internationally oriented, with abstract and non-figurative art achieving pre-eminence.

The present exhibition comprises thirty-three works by the same number of Canadian painters created over a seventy-year period, from 1912 to 1982. Other than the earliest painting by Emily Carr, the works cover the second and third stages

referred to above. Even the Carr canvas, though of an earlier date, represents the new style of painting which dominated the art scene in the 1920s and 1930s.

The concept of landscape is taken very broadly, in the Collection and in this exhibition, to include both figurative and non-figurative or abstract art.

It is perhaps useful to make the distinction here between abstract and non-figurative art. Abstract art is the portrayal of a real object in such a way that the original physical entity becomes unrecognizable, while non-figurative art is created entirely from imagination. Over the period covered in this exhibition some landscape painters arrived at a point where their works showed no real resemblance between what they had seen and what they produced, and yet these works reflect a link with the country that inspired them.