

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald
Broken Tree in Landscape
1931, 35.5 x 42.8 cm
Winnipeg Art Gallery
Gift of the Women's
Committee



Photo: Winnipeg Art Gallery

(1882–1974), who was born in Montreal and travelled the length and breadth of Canada, but whose home base was in Ontario. In style, however, Varley's B.C. pictures, like Jackson's Maritime ones, have much in common with the works of Tom Thomson, J E H MacDonald (1873–1932) and others of the Group.

But, as the exhibition at the Barbican Gallery in London will amply demonstrate, the Group of Seven did not have exclusive rights to Canadian landscape painting in the early part of this century and, because of their preferred subject matter, could not define the whole nation. Emily Carr stands out for her passionate commitment to the forests and Indian villages of western Canada. But where the Group of Seven saw themselves as helping to create Canadian nationhood, she was recording the supernatural mystery of the thick forests, the mythical power of the Haida totems and, later, the wonderment of the large skies.

In some ways Carr's counterpart, Clarence Gagnon (1881–1942) devoted his painting career to recording the *habitants* of rural Quebec. His outstanding contribution to the genre are the 54 illustrations he made for the 1933 edition of Louis Hemon's novel *Maria Chapedelaine*. A somewhat

Clarence Alphonse Gagnon
1881–1942
Village in the Laurentian
Mountains
oil on canvas, c1924
89.2 x 130.7 cm
National Gallery of Canada,
Ottawa



Photo: National Art Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

sentimental account of a backwoods romance, it lovingly details the back-breaking labour required to clear land, farm, and raise a family without the benefits of electricity, running water or the internal combustion engine. Much of Gagnon's work was done in Europe, a fact which both suggests the powerful hold the Quebec images had on him and explains their rather sanitised quality.

But none of these painters or any of the other Canadians painting landscapes in the first half of this century was working in isolation. Varley and Arthur Lismer (1775–1969) were born in Sheffield and studied at the School of Art there. Lismer carried on to the Antwerp Academy before emigrating and Varley returned to Europe as a war artist, making a vivid and moving record of the Canadian troops in France. J E H MacDonald was born in Durham though he was still a teenager when he and his father moved to Canada. Emily Carr was painting genteel, ladylike watercolours in a manner learned in San Francisco and England and encouraged by the conservative Victoria society by which she was surrounded until a year later in Paris studying 'the New Art' opened her eyes to the post-impressionist world.

The majority of the Canadian landscape painters were trained in Europe and some, like Clarence Gagnon and J.W. Morrice (1865–1924), were expatriates for most of their lives. In short, these painters were aware of what their contemporaries in Europe were doing. Paul Cezanne, Emile Nolde and the Fauvists have much in common with the Canadians and it is easy to imagine how Henri Matisse's response would have been like theirs had he found himself away from the Mediterranean and painting in the northern light of Algoma or Algonquin Park. All these European painters were concerned with light and space and their representation of a two dimensional surface. Matisse said he was not painting an object but the emotion it evoked in him. Emily Carr claimed in 1935 that 'a picture equals movement in space.' It is clear that even Lawren Harris, the most nationalistic of painters, was also occupied, however unconsciously, by the painterly concerns of his generation.

Since the period of the Group of seven, Canadian art has also found its place in a more complex contemporary international arts scene, and there is no doubt that the second exhibition at the Barbican, even though deeply concerned with the concept of landscape will be profoundly influenced by this present day approach to art.

It is interesting, for example, to know that only a few oil paintings have been selected for the second exhibition. Photographs and a variety of less conventional materials have been used by the artists featured. The urbanisation and industrialisation of Canada has of course greatly influenced the way Canadians make art and look at art today. The omnipresence of nature will always offer a prominent place in the concept of landscape in the imagery. What these two exhibitions have in common is a deeply rooted concept which has evolved in Canada since the beginning of the century, albeit viewed in different ways.