

THE PASSING OF A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE GROUP OF SEVEN

Arthur Lismer, a founding member of Canada's famous Group of Seven died in a Montreal hospital last month at the age of 83.

The Group was founded in 1919 by seven artists who spent their weekends and holidays sketching in the Georgian Bay district and Northern Ontario as an escape from the routine work of Toronto studios. They became strongly attached to the rocky, pine-clad northern wilderness, with its lonely lakes, silent forests and brilliant autumn colours.

Canadian landscape had previously been depicted in conventional European and British hues, but these young painters wanted to show the grandeur of the northern lands in a more dramatic manner. Under the influence of the French impressionists, they evolved a bold and vigorous style based on design, pattern and simplification of form. Their daring shocked many art critics but in time their work began to gain recognition.

COURSE OF CAREER

Dr. Lismer was born in Sheffield and studied art in Antwerp before coming to Canada in 1911. When the First World War broke out, he moved from Toronto, where he was working with an engraving firm, to Halifax, where he was commissioned to paint minesweepers and sea-planes for the Canadian War Memorials. Most of these paintings are now the property of Canada's National Gallery. Some of Dr. Lismer's most important canvasses were painted between 1921 and 1927. He was very much under the spell of the rugged Algoma landscape, and, in the brilliant colours and giant rhythms of his paintings, he evokes the majesty of this haunting wilderness. Much of Dr. Lismer's life was devoted to teaching. He became principal of the Nova Scotia College of Art shortly after he moved to that province, and within two years he had transformed it into a first-rate art school. In 1933 he founded the Children's Art Centre in Toronto, where he worked on progressive methods of teaching. He also spent a year in South Africa organizing art classes for children. He was the educational supervisor of the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Association of Montreal. Until two years ago, Dr. Lismer was principal of the School of Art and Design at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

Three other founders of the Group are still living: Fred Varley (86), A.Y. Jackson (84) and Lawren Harris (81). Varley was the one artist of the Group interested primarily in portraiture. He went on occasional camping trips to Georgian Bay, however, and one of his paintings of that area is now a part of the collection of the National Gallery. The harsh



Dr. Arthur Lismer

Canadian winters has a special appeal for A.Y. Jackson, many of whose familiar paintings are of winter scenes. Lawren Harris preferred the stark landscape of the north shore of Lake Superior, and his paintings stand out for the degree of their abstraction and the cold but vibrant colours he uses.

The other founding members — J.E.H. MacDonald, Franz Johnston and Frank Carmichael — are dead. Another artist, who belonged to this group of painters but died three years before they became known as the Group of Seven through a joint exhibition held in Toronto — was Tom Thomson. Born in a small town in Ontario, he spent the early years of his life on a farm near Owen Sound, Ontario and became devoted to the Canadian northland. He had a natural love of outdoor life, was a skillful canoeist, and was capable of keeping up with the best guides and trappers. The small sketches in which he made use of strong simple colours project a jewel-like quality. He was drowned in Algonquin Park in 1917. (See also *Canadian Weekly Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 7, dated February 12, 1969, P. 5.)