

Group of Seven paintings tour Britain and the Soviet Union

A major collection of paintings by the Group of Seven, Canadian landscape painters, from the McMichael Canadian Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, will be exhibited in Scotland, England and the Soviet Union under the joint auspices of the Department of External Affairs and the province of Ontario, with the assistance of Air Canada.

In co-operation with the Scottish Arts Council, the paintings will be shown at the Kelvin Grove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow from August 24 to September 19, the Talbot Rice Centre at Edinburgh University from September 29 to October 29 and at the Aberdeen Art Gallery from November 24 to December 18. The collection will then be shown in London at the Canada House Art Gallery, Trafalgar Square, from January 11 to February 24. The itinerary for the U.S.S.R., which will include two or three major centres beginning in March, will be announced later.

Group's first exhibition

The collection represents an art movement that had its official beginnings nearly 60 years ago, when seven artists held an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto. The original "Group of Seven" eventually included ten landscape painters, and the touring collection of 44 works includes paintings by eight of them: Tom Thomson, a catalyst for the movement who drowned before the group was actually formed; Frank Carmichael; A.J. Casson; Lawren Harris; A.Y. Jackson; Frank Johnston; Arthur Lismer; J.E.H. MacDonald and F.H. Varley. Only A.J. Casson is alive today and maintaining an active career as a painter at 78 years of age. Although they last exhibited together in 1931, the painters of the group remain the best known exponents of a distinctively nationalist movement in the history of Canadian art.

Adventurers, the Group of Seven crossed Canada from ocean to ocean and from the southern border penetrating deep into the Arctic Circle. Their brushes spontaneously interpreted the Canadian Shield, the towering mountains, the solitude of the magnificent

lakes and forests, and the simplicity of the village homesteads. Their palettes, vibrant with the pure colours of the North, inspired panels of dramatic impact and freshness.

Dedication to Canada

They were dedicated to a direct and unaffected mode of painting derived from an experience of the Canadian land that all Canadians could recognize. "The great purpose of Canadian art," said A.Y. Jackson, senior member of the group, "is to make us feel at home in our own country."

From their many sketching trips to the northlands, the artists brought views of the brilliant colours and the drama of the Canadian woodlands which were romantic and revolutionary statements of "the true North strong and free". Although their styles varied, they shared a common dependence upon the inspirational quality of the landscape. Their works became accepted, and purchased by enthusiasts in Canada and in Britain. The Tate Gallery in London bought one of A.Y. Jackson's

paintings following the group's showing at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924.

Formation in 1920

The Group of Seven, with members Carmichael, Harris, Jackson, Johnston, Lismer, MacDonald, and Varley was formed in 1920 without constitution, minutes or regular meetings. In their first catalogue, published at Toronto in 1920, the artists stated they "...have for several years held a like vision concerning art in Canada".

The artists expanded in 1933 to become the larger more representative Canadian Group of Painters.

Tom Thomson, a prodigious artist, perhaps nearest to nature of all, drowned in the vast remote expanse of Algonquin Park, Ontario, in the north-land he loved. Although he did not live to hear the words, Group of Seven, Thomson remains revered in Canadian painting and lore.

Arthur Lismer spoke for the group... "Above everything else, we must have life, vitality and vigour in our art... Art is the means by which we set the seal of our nationality."



Frank Varley (1881-1969), painted Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay in 1920. It is one of 44 works in an exhibition

by the Group of Seven on tour in Britain, which will be shown in the Soviet Union in March.