Group of Seven (artists)

The Group of Seven was a movement of Canadian landscape painters from 1920 to 1933, originally consisting of A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thomson, J.E.H. MacDonald, Franklin Carmichael, F.G. Stanley, Arthur Lismer, and Frederick Varley. They are known for their paintings inspired by the Canadian landscape, and initiated the first major Canadian national art movement. The Group was succeeded by the Canadian Group of Painters in the 1930s, which included members from the Beaver Hall Group who had a history of showing with the Group of Seven internationally.

**Collections**

Large collections of work from the Group of Seven can be found at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa as well as the Ottawa Art Gallery (home to the Firestone Collection of Canadian Art) and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario. The National Gallery, under the directorship of Eric Brown, was an early institutional supporter of artists associated with the Group, purchasing art from some of their early exhibitions before they had identified themselves officially as the Group of Seven. The Art Gallery of Ontario, in its earlier incarnation as the Art Gallery of Toronto, was the site of their first exhibition as the Group of Seven. The McMichael was founded by Robert and Signe McMichael, who began collecting paintings by the Group of Seven and their contemporaries in 1955.

**History**

Tom Thomson, J. E. H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston and Franklin Carmichael met as employees of the design firm Grip Ltd. in Toronto. In 1913, they were joined by A. Y. (Alexander Young) Jackson and Lawren Harris. They often met at the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto to discuss their opinions and share their art. This group received monetary support from Harris (heir to the Massey-Harris farm machinery fortune) and Dr. James MacCallum. Harris and MacCallum jointly built the Studio Building in 1914 in the Rosedale ravine to serve as a meeting and working place for the new Canadian art movement. MacCallum owned land on Georgian Bay and Thomson worked as a guide in nearby Algonquin Park, both places where he and the other artists often travelled for inspiration.

The informal group was temporarily split up during World War I, during which Jackson and Varley became official war artists. A further blow to the group came in 1917 when Thomson died while canoeing in Algonquin Park. He appeared to have suffered a blow to the head and showed no signs of drowning. The circumstances of his death remain mysterious.

The seven who formed the original group reunited after the war. They continued to travel throughout Ontario, especially the Muskoka and Algoma regions, sketching the landscape and developing techniques to represent it in art. In 1919, they decided to make themselves into a group devoted to a distinct Canadian form of art which didn’t exist yet, and began to call themselves the Group of Seven. It is unknown who specifically chose these seven men, but it is believed to have been Harris. By 1920, they were ready for their first exhibition thanks to the constant support and encouragement of Eric Brown, the director of the National Gallery at that time. Prior to this, many artists believed the Canadian landscape was not worthy of being painted. Reviews for the 1920 exhibition were mixed, but as the decade progressed the Group came to be recognized as pioneers of a new, Canadian, school of art.

After Frank Johnston left the group in 1920 to move to Winnipeg, A. J. Casson was invited to join in 1920. Franklin Carmichael had taken a liking to him and had encouraged Casson to sketch and paint for many years beforehand. The Group's champions during its early years included Barker Fairley, a co-founder of Canadian Forum magazine, and the warden of Hart House at the University of Toronto, J. Bumon Bickersteth. The members of the Group began to travel elsewhere in Canada for inspiration, including British Columbia, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and the Arctic. After Samuel Gurney Cresswell and other painters on Royal Navy expeditions, these were the first artists of European descent who depicted the Arctic. Soon, the Group made the decision that to be called a "national school of painters" there should be members from outside of Toronto. So, in 1930, Edwin Holgate from Montreal, Quebec became a member and in 1932, also LeMoine Fitzgerald from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Group's influence was so widespread by the end of 1931, and after J.E.H. MacDonald's death in 1932, they no longer consisted of the majority of Canada's leading artists—held its first exhibition in 1933, and continued to hold exhibitions almost every year as a successful society until 1967.

**Legacy**

The Group of Seven has received criticism for its reinforcement of terra nullius presenting the region as pristine and untouched by humans when in fact the areas depicted have been lived in for many centuries.

In 1995, the National Gallery of Canada compiled a Group of Seven retrospective show, for which they commissioned the Canadian rock band Rheostatics to write a musical score. That score was released on album as Music Inspired by the Group of Seven.

Six members of the group, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Lawren Harris, Franklin Carmichael, and A.J. Casson, along with four of the artists’ wives are buried on-site at the Michael Canadian Art Collection in the small patch of consecrated land bordered by trees, with graves marked by large chunks of the Canadian Shield.

**Recognition**

On 18 September 1970 Canada Post issued 'The Group of Seven' designed by Alan Robb Fleming based on a painting “Isles of Spruce” (1922) by Arthur Lismer in the Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto. The 66 stamps are perforated 11 and were printed by Ashdon-Potter Limited. On 29 June 1995, Canada Post issued 10 stamps, each based on a painting of each member of the group (7 original members and 3 new members):

- Francis Hans Johnston, “Serenity, Lake of the Woods”
- Arthur Lismer, “A September Gale, Georgian Bay”
- James Edward Hervey MacDonald, “Falls, Mattawa, Ottawa River”
- Frederick Horsman Varley, “Open Window”
- Franklin Carmichael, “October Gold”
- Lawren Stewart Harris, “North of Lake Superior”
- Alexander Young Jackson, “Evening, Les Éboulements”
On year 2012–2013, Royal Canadian Mint issued 7 pure silver 1-oz coins, each one reproduced one painting of a member of the Group of Seven. The Group of Seven was a group of Canadian landscape painters in the 1920s, originally composed of members such as A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, and J.E.H. MacDonald. By the early 1930s, the Group's art was popular around the world. Many Canadian artists started to feel that the National Gallery of Canada exhibited favouritism for the Group's work and they were the only Canadian artists to receive global recognition. Concern over the Gallery's decisions led to the formation of the Canadian Group of Painters in February 1933.

See also

Emily Carr
Indian Group of Seven
Ralph Wallace Burton

References

11. Silko, David P. (2003), *Introduction*, The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson. Toronto, Ontario: Firefly Books Ltd. p. 17. ISBN 1-55297-605-X. “Someone decided whom to invite to that historic meeting, and probably Harris, or Harris after confering with MacDonald, was responsible.”
15. A.Y. Jackson, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
16. Arthur Lismer, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
17. Frederick Varley, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
18. J.E.H. MacDonald, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
19. Frank Johnston, McMichael Canadian Art Collection
20. A.J. Casson, McMichael Canadian Art Collection

Further reading


External links

- CBC Digital Archives - The Group of Seven: Painters in the Wilderness
- Group of Seven Gallery - McMichael Gallery
- The Canadian Encyclopedia, The Group of Seven
consisting of Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley. Tom Thomson (who died in 1917) and Emily Carr were also closely associated with the Group of Seven, though neither were ever official members. The Group of Seven is most famous for its paintings of the Canadian landscape. It was succeeded by the Canadian Group of Painters in the 1930s. The Group of Seven was strongly influenced by European Impressionism of the late nineteenth century. The Group of Seven, also known as the Algonquin School, was a unity of landscape painters. It was founded in 1920 as an organization of self-proclaimed modern artists and disbanded in 1933. The painters of the Group of Seven depicted Canada's panoramas as a reflection of a romanticized notion of Canadian strength and independence. Their works feature bright colors, tactile paint handling, and simple yet dynamic forms. The original members of the Group of Seven were Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and F.H. Varley.

Around 1912 a loosely knit group of artists began to paint Canada as they saw it. Sketch boxes in tow, they journeyed all over the country to paint the wilderness with bold colours and a broad, decorative style. Despite the death of mentor Tom Thomson in 1917, these painters banded together as the Group of Seven in 1920 to forge a new Canadian expression. Their vision shaped how Canadians saw their own country and left a legacy that continues to provoke debate and discussion.