

KUNSTHALLE MÜNCHEN

Press release

CANADA AND IMPRESSIONISM: NEW HORIZONS* 19 July – 17 November 2019

Organized by the National Gallery of Canada
in collaboration with the Kunsthalle München

For the first time in Europe, Kunsthalle München presents an exhibition of Impressionist masterpieces by Canadian artists dating from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Featuring around 120 paintings from public and private collections, both Canadian and international, the exhibition introduces 36 Impressionists, both male and female, who are virtually unknown in this part of the world. As was customary for international artists, many Canadians travelled to Paris beginning in the late 1870s, enticed by the promise of studying under celebrated French painters. While some remained in Europe others returned to their homeland, introducing Impressionism to Canadian audiences. By depicting Canadian subjects, especially landscapes, they captured the incomparable moods produced by the specific topography, light and climate of the North. These artists thus not only made a significant contribution to the worldwide spread of Impressionism, but also created a highly distinctive, inimitable art for their young nation.

Can we speak of “Canadian” Impressionism? The paintings beguile us with purple, shimmering Canadian snow scenes of horse-drawn sleighs, an ice harvest under a hazy sky, wooden totem poles and trees with buckets to collect maple sap. We also encounter Parisian street scenes, women in Japanese dress, Breton washerwomen, children engrossed in books and riders on a Moroccan beach. Is the determining factor of Canadian Impressionism the artist’s citizenship, place of birth or residence? Or is it a Canadian motif or a specific style? The sheer variety of artworks allows us to explore the extent to which these questions were relevant during the artists’ lifetimes and how they influence the history of art to this day.

In 1867 the British and former French colonies were united to form the Dominion of Canada. Institutions that offered the chance to study art were just being founded in the young confederation, but initiatives to establish academic training for artists in Montreal and Toronto were slow to bear fruit. Canadians who sought to further their artistic careers – and who had the necessary means to travel overseas – often chose to study in Paris, the heart of the international art scene. The teaching staff of the venerable École des beaux-arts and the private Académies

* The German title of the exhibition in Munich is *In einem neuen Licht. Kanada und der Impressionismus*, which translates as *In a New Light: Canada and Impressionism*.

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Julian and Colarossi, which admitted women from an early stage, included acclaimed artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), William Bouguereau (1825–1905) and Léon Bonnat (1833–1922).

Although this training was grounded in an Academic study of the human form, most of the artists subsequently gravitated toward landscapes. Taking artists like William Blair Bruce (1859–1906) as an example, the exhibition visualizes how their initial orientation toward what was referred to as the Barbizon School, whose members had embraced *plein-air* painting in the Forest of Fontainebleau since the 1840s, was followed by a fascination with Impressionism. In 1887, just a few years after Claude Monet (1840–1926) took up residence in Giverny, Bruce and five other North American painters founded an artists' colony there. This gave rise to depictions of the natural world, capturing the changing seasons, the play of light or reflections on the water with broken brushstrokes and vivid colours. The aspiration not to paint the landscape itself, but the impression it creates – the credo of the French Impressionists – is also discernible in the sensuous open-air scenes made by the Canadian artists, who discovered countless charming motifs in the French countryside and coastal towns in Brittany and Normandy. They invariably show the landscape as a cultivated natural environment that has been tamed by man, whether as the domain of the rural population or the playground of the bourgeoisie.

Two sections of the exhibition are devoted to the representation of women and children at leisure. Associated with conventional notions of domesticity and its feminine connotations, the use of these motifs contributed to artistic success for women artists such as Laura Muntz (1860–1930) or Helen McNicoll (1879–1915). In an age of advancing industrialization and progressive urban sprawl, the artists created a plethora of idealized images of rural life or a blissful, pastoral childhood in the arms of nature. Impressionism opened up new opportunities for depicting human figures in a natural setting, which were also increasingly explored for portraits or leisure scenes *en plein air*. The equal status of light and atmosphere, alongside the subject, is reflected in the titles of works like Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté's (1869–1937) *Youth and Sunlight*. Capturing the overall mood or impression became the primary goal of these artists, rather than a faithful representation of the subject itself.

A further contrast to the hustle and bustle of city life at the dawn of the 20th century are the paintings of faraway places produced by Canadian artists on their frequent travels beyond France. These works are gathered together in a separate room in the exhibition. As the "Gateway to the Orient", Venice was a popular destination. Delicately hued canvases of the lagoon city earned James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924) the epithet "poet of the landscape" among his contemporaries. Moreover, French and British territories in North Africa or the Caribbean are portrayed as areas of unspoiled natural beauty, conducive to the peaceful co-existence of man and nature. Some paintings also reveal a Western construct of the "exotic Other." Franklin Brownell's (1857–1946) impressionistic scene of black women trading at the Caribbean port of St. Kitts is a striking counterpoint to the idle domesticity of the white female bourgeoisie. At home, the call for a distinct, Canadian art grounded in a search for national identity became

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increasingly loud. However, those painters who had studied in Europe sometimes struggled to gain recognition among collectors at home as they competed with the popularity of the more traditional Barbizon painters and the Hague School. Furthermore, an artistic infrastructure that supported Canadian art was still being developed. Nevertheless, the atmospheric rendering of the Canadian scenery in an Impressionist style helped the movement to gain wider acceptance. Maurice Cullen (1866–1934) and Suzor-Coté in particular became renowned for their winter landscapes. In two sections, the exhibition focuses on the Canadian artists after their return home. They created predominantly rural scenes, most of which were painted in Quebec, along with some cityscapes in which the smoke from the factory chimneys and electric lights herald the modern era, while the ubiquitous horse-drawn carts evoke a longing to preserve a world about to change.

The innovations in landscape painting ushered in by Impressionists such as Cullen, Morrice and Suzor-Coté, which dominated Canadian art well into the 20th century, inspired a group of young artists in Toronto and Montreal to strike out in a new direction in the 1910s. In 1920, influenced by Post-Impressionism, the painters formed the Group of Seven in Toronto and the Beaver Hall Group in Montreal, creating a new image of Canada. Their paintings are featured in the final section of the exhibition. On the one hand, Group of Seven artists and their supporters engaged in a mythologization of the Canadian landscape for the purpose of creating a national identity: they painted a wild, untamed Nordic nature with vast, rugged rocky formations, raging rivers and tranquil lakes, embellished with an explosion of glorious fall foliage or snow-covered forests. However, in recent decades, the stylization of these landscapes as the epitome of Canadian art has been reconsidered: the suggested emptiness of the country ignores the Indigenous population and omits the mining operations, timber industry and railway tracks. On the other hand, works by members of the Montreal-based Beaver Hall Group present a broad perspective of artistic production during this period. With its wide variety of subjects, the Beaver Hall Group, which also boasted many female members, played an important role in the emergence of modern urban Canadian art.

The exhibition highlights the legacy of the Canadian Impressionists, demonstrating how these artists developed their specific, highly diverse style of Impressionism and traced a distinctive artistic path. Unlike their French counterparts, challenging rigid academic structures or the traditional hierarchy of genres was not paramount. Instead, the artists strove to establish an image of their country somewhere between the Canadian and the foreign, between the artistic avant-garde and the liberation from European influence, between rural tradition and urban modernity, and between the untamed wilderness and industrial progress.

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Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons (In einem neuen Licht. Kanada und der Impressionismus / Le Canada et l'impressionnisme. Nouveaux horizons) is organized by the National Gallery of Canada in collaboration with the Kunsthalle München, Fondation de l'Hermitage, and Musée Fabre. After its presentation in Munich, it will be displayed at the Fondation de l'Hermitage in Lausanne, Switzerland, from 24 January until 24 May 2020, and at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier, France, from 13 June until 27 September 2020, before opening at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa in November 2020.

“It is our very great pleasure to be able to realize this exhibition in collaboration with the National Gallery of Canada and to present Canadian Impressionism to Europe together with our partner museums in Lausanne and Montpellier,” says Roger Diederer, Director of the Kunsthalle München.

“Much like the artists represented in *Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons*, the National Gallery of Canada is committed to furthering the appreciation and understanding of Canadian art abroad,” says Dr. Sasha Suda, Director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada. “This exhibition, which showcases the very best of artistic production at the turn of the 20th century, is the first one of this calibre on Canadian art ever presented in Germany. We are grateful to the Kunsthalle München for the inspiration and dedication they brought to our collaboration. It is our hope that this exhibition will grant enjoyment to all.”

“The exhibition has been fully funded by a dedicated community of Canadian philanthropists whose knowledge and passion for Canadian art and scholarship is an inspiration,” says Karen Colby-Stothart, CEO of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation. The exhibition is presented with the exceptional generosity of Exhibition Patron The A.K. Prakash Foundation. The international tour to Germany, Switzerland, and France was made possible by the National Gallery of Canada Foundation through its donors, including the Pierre Lassonde Family Foundation, the Donald R. Sobey Family Foundation, and the Distinguished Patrons of the National Gallery of Canada, a pan-Canadian family of visionary philanthropists dedicated to supporting high-impact projects and innovative partnerships. The National Gallery of Canada Foundation also acknowledges Heffel Fine Art Auction House, Masters Gallery, Dr. Kanta Marwah, and Michael J. Tims, C.M. and Renae N. Tims, as well as many individual donors who have contributed passionately and enthusiastically to advancing the study of Canadian historical art in Canada and abroad.

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Nestled between Marienplatz and Odeonsplatz in the heart of Munich, the **Kunsthalle München** organizes three exhibitions annually and has built up an international reputation. With an area of approximately 1,200 m² equipped with state of the art museum technology, the exhibition space provides a worthy stage for all artforms. Every year, the Kunsthalle welcomes around 350,000 visitors every year and is one of Germany's leading exhibition venues. The most important criterion for the selection of an exhibition theme is an outstanding level of artistic quality. The time range spans from prehistory and early history right through to the present day. Art and culture from around the world are displayed here in all their glory, whether it be painting, sculpture, graphic arts, photography, handcrafts or design. Monographic exhibitions and themed projects share the spotlight, however, the Kunsthalle München also pursues an interdisciplinary approach in its diverse programme.

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OPENING HOURS

daily 10am–8pm | **21.8., 18.9.** and **16.10.:** 10am–10pm

Special opening hours for school groups:

each wednesday 9am–10am, by appointment only: kontakt@kunsthalle-muc.de

DIRECTOR

Roger Diederer

EXHIBITION CURATOR

Katerina Atanassova (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) in collaboration with
Nerina Santorius (Kunsthalle München)

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS IMAGES FOR DOWNLOAD

https://www.kunsthalle-muc.de/en/press_area/canada/

ADMISSION FEE

Standard: € 12 | **Reduced fees:** Senior citizens (60+): € 11 | Students (< 30 years) and unemployed: € 6 |
Young people (6–18 years): € 1 | Children under 6: free of charge | school classes: € 1 per pupil (pre-booked)
| Family pass for 2 adults and their (grand-)children (< 18 years): € 22 | On Mondays 50% discount on all
admission fees

GUIDED TOURS

Guided tours for groups: guided tours in languages other than German: Tue–Sat: 10am–8pm, by appointment
only: kontakt@kunsthalle-muc.de

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME (SUMMARY)

»Re-Act!« Harry Klein goes Kunsthalle and Afterwork^{KH} evenings, a **concert** midst the exhibition and **lectures**.
Furthermore there will be **curator's tours** and **guided tours** for children.

CATALOGUE

Accompanying the exhibition is a comprehensive catalogue co-published by the National Gallery of Canada
and Arnoldsche Art Publishers. With over 300 colour illustrations, it includes contributions by Katerina
Atanassova, Tobi Bruce, Anna Hudson, Laurier Lacroix, Lauren Lerner, Tracey Lock, Gerta Moray,
Sandra Paikowsky, and a foreword by Adam Gopnik.

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