



139 Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA RSA 1882 – 1974

November, Georgian Bay

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled
and dated circa 1920 on the Roberts Gallery label
25 x 32 in, 63.5 x 81.3 cm

PROVENANCE

On loan from the Artist to Central Neighbourhood House,
Toronto, 1920s – 1961
Acquired from the Artist by Paul Duval, Toronto, June 27, 1961
Roberts Gallery, Toronto
A Prominent Canadian Executive and Philanthropist,
Toronto, circa 1962

LITERATURE

St. George Burgoyne, “R.C.A. Show Opened with Private View,”
The Gazette (Montreal), November 22, 1929
A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter’s Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson*,
1967, page 74

EXHIBITED

Edmonton Museum of Arts, *Loan Exhibition*, October 21 – 23,
1926, catalogue #24
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Exhibition of Paintings by the Group of
Seven*, February 1928, catalogue #37, listed as \$250
Art Association of Montreal, *Royal Canadian Academy of Arts*,
November 21 – December 22, 1929, catalogue #111

THE MONTREAL ARTIST A.Y. Jackson first visited Georgian Bay in the summer of 1910. His first canvases of the bay, like those by J.E.H. MacDonald and Arthur Lismer, were characterized by broad, expansive skies over a low horizon. Yet his response to the Georgian Bay landscape was largely negative. “I have done very little sketching—the country does not lend itself to it,” he wrote to his mother in early July. “It’s a great country to have a holiday in... but it’s nothing but little islands covered with scrub and pine trees and not quite paintable.”

When Jackson returned to Georgian Bay in the fall of 1913, the broad expanse of sky so characteristic of the Georgian Bay landscape was replaced in his work by rocky islands and windblown pines silhouetted against the sky, as seen in the 1913 canvas *Night, Georgian Bay*, originally entitled *Land of the Leaning Pine* (in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, #1697). The precursor of such outstanding classics as Arthur Lismer’s *September Gale* and Fred Varley’s *Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay*, this was a subject Jackson would reinterpret in many superb canvases over the next three decades.

Jackson spent part of the summer of 1919 on Georgian Bay after his return from military duties in France and England, but his most productive stay on the bay was in February and March 1920. Six major canvases resulted from this trip, four of which were included in the first Group of Seven exhibition, in 1920. The paintings are notable for their variety of treatment and experimentation, from the calm horizontality of *Cognashene Lake* (in the collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor, #76.11) to the volcanic clouds of *March Storm, Georgian Bay*, originally titled *Storm Over a Frozen Lake* (in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, #5051) and the decorative, almost Japanese, vertical arrangement of rocks, ice, water and windblown pines of *Freddy Channel*, originally titled *March Snow* (in a private collection). In the latter two, snow-covered rocks define the right foreground, and the low, pine-crowned rocky islands recede vertically into the distance, a composition Jackson would reinterpret in *November, Georgian Bay*.

In November 1921, and not 1922 as he wrote in *A Painter’s Country*, Jackson was at Georgian Bay once again. “In November... I went to the Bay with Dr. MacCallum. He stopped with a friend, Wilton Morse, to do some duck shooting, while I, in a small boat, went farther north and camped on an island. I put up my tent between the shore and a small lake. During the night it got very cold and I had only a single blanket, I was nearly frozen. I got up at daybreak to make a fire, and found an inch of ice on the lake. It was here that I made the studies for a canvas, ‘November, Georgian Bay,’ now in Hart House.” This was the only time Jackson painted on the bay in November.

That same month, the Victoria architect Samuel Maclure wrote to Eric Brown of the National Gallery of Canada, asking him to select a Canadian painting for a presentation by the Victoria Chamber of Commerce. Of the three untitled Jacksons selected for Brown by Lawren Harris, the “best,” *First Snow, Georgian Bay* (Harris’s title and our painting being offered here), had been

“painted this autumn after a snow flurry... with a rocky foreground and two bands of beautiful colour behind.” It measured 25 x 32 inches and would cost \$350.

Four canvases resulted from this November trip. *Georgian Bay, November* was exhibited with the Ontario Society of Artists in March 1922 priced at \$350 and was purchased by Hart House at the University of Toronto in May. *November Moonlight* (unlocated) and *November, Georgian Bay* (later titled *Tadenac, November*) were exhibited with the Group of Seven in May 1922 and priced at \$1,000.

Of the three known November canvases, both the Hart House painting and our painting, *November, Georgian Bay*, measure 25 x 32 inches, but only our painting *November, Georgian Bay* shows evidence of the first snowfall and must be the painting offered to Victoria in November 1921.

In the 1920s, unable to sell his canvases, Jackson loaned *November, Georgian Bay* to the Central Neighbourhood House, an agency that assisted poor children who lived in Toronto’s Ward district. There it was spotted by the art writer and dealer Paul Duval. In his account book for 1961, Jackson noted the sale of an “old canvas *November, Georgian Bay*” to Paul Duval on June 27, 1961, for \$160.

November, Georgian Bay is an outstanding canvas from a key period in Jackson’s development as an artist and in the history of the Group of Seven. A classic Jacksonian subject, the rolling rhythms of the snow-covered rocks in the foreground counter the windblown pine at the right and are echoed by the silhouettes of the islands in the distance. The palette is restrained, highlighted by the reds and browns of the rocks and the yellow light of the sun on the water. When it was exhibited in 1929, the *Montreal Gazette*’s art writer, St. George Burgoyne, often a severe critic of Jackson, admired the painting, stating, “A.Y. Jackson, R.C.A., not very cheering in color, shows three oils, the most engaging being ‘November, Georgian Bay,’ with ruddy rocks, wind-bent pines and water.”

Jackson’s letter to his mother and his account books are in the Naomi Jackson Groves fonds at Library & Archives Canada, Ottawa, and the correspondence between Brown and Maclure is at the National Gallery of Canada.

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada and author of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000