



136 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

Morning, Lake Superior

oil on board, signed and on verso inscribed *Elise Kingman, c/o Mrs. [illegible] / Miss Elise Kingman, c/o Mrs [illegible], 20 de Casson Rd. Westmount, circa 1926 – 1927*
12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm

PROVENANCE

Elise Kingman, Montreal and United Kingdom
By descent to Abner Kingman, Montreal
By descent to the present Private Collection,
United States

LITERATURE

A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson*, 1958, page 46

LAWREN HARRIS FIRST painted on the north shore of Lake Superior with A.Y. Jackson in September 1921. As Jackson later

wrote in his autobiography, *A Painter's Country*, "The Algoma country was too opulent for Harris; he wanted something bare and stark, so at the conclusion of one of our sketching trips he and I went to the north shore of Lake Superior, a country much of which had been burnt over years before... I know of no more impressive scenery in Canada for the landscape painter. There is a sublime order to it, the long curves of the beaches, the sweeping ranges of hills, and headlands that push out into the lake." Harris would return there to paint almost every year until 1928. Harris's first Superior canvases depicted the glaciated, rocky hills and dead stumps overlooking the lake around Port Coldwell. As the decade progressed he increasingly focused on the vast expanse of water and dramatic effects of light and cloud. Until 1924 he sketched on Beaverboard panels about 10 ½ by 14 inches, but in 1925 adopted a larger format of about 12 by 15 inches, which was better suited to the wide vistas that were his new subjects.

In this oil sketch Harris anchors the viewer on the rocks lower right and directs the eye diagonally to the middle ground and to the conical island in the upper left. A low rise, light blue hills and

scalloped clouds cut across the upper part of the composition. He is not looking across Lake Superior but over the many small islands and rocks off the Coldwell Peninsula. The restrained palette is limited to mauve-browns, blues and whites. The clouds hover over the waters and a clear white light, the principal subject of the painting, illuminates the centre of the composition.

Harris selected this sketch to be worked up into a canvas titled *Morning, Lake Superior*, now in the collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The title comes from Doris Mills's 1936 inventory of the paintings Harris left in Toronto following his departure for New Hampshire in 1934, though there is no record of Harris having exhibited a painting by this title prior to 1934. A related canvas titled *Morning Light, Lake Superior*, now in the Art Gallery of Guelph, was acquired by Dr. Freda Fraser in 1927 and included in the 1930 Group of Seven exhibition. In the Montreal canvas the forms are smoother and more geometric than in this sketch, and the slightly warmer glowing light highlights the upper surface of the central and foreground rocks. The braided clouds are more sculptural, foreshadowing Harris's abstracts of the 1930s.

The oil sketch most probably dates from the fall of 1926 or 1927 and is painted from the same point of view as *Lake Superior Sketch LI* in the Art Gallery of Windsor. The dramatic shafts of light in the latter and the conical island in this sketch also relate to the painting that Emily Carr saw Harris working on in Toronto in December 1927, which was exhibited as *Fantasy* in the February 1928 Group of Seven exhibition (now titled *Lake Superior* and in the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario). Stimulated by the vast international collection of abstract paintings included in the Société Anonyme exhibition that he brought to Toronto in April 1927, Harris experimented boldly in *Fantasy* and in *Morning, Lake Superior*, increasingly stylizing the natural forms for dramatic effect.

This sketch for the canvas *Morning, Lake Superior* was acquired by Elise Kingman, a friend of the Canadian painter Lilius Torrance Newton. Kingman also wanted to acquire Jackson's canvas *Winter, Quebec* for her brother Abner Kingman in January 1928. Although Jackson had promised the painting to the Kingmans, they allowed Alice and Vincent Massey to acquire it when they learned the painting would hang in the Canadian legation in Washington (it is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada). In 1930, Newton painted the beautiful, elegant portrait of Elise Kingman that is now in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The discovery of this oil sketch for MMFA's Lake Superior canvas provides a glimpse into the small community of collectors of contemporary Canadian art in the late 1920s, and also provides insight into Harris's creative process at this key moment in his career.

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada, author of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* and coordinator of *Tom Thomson, the 2002 - 2003 retrospective of the artist's work*, which originated at the National Gallery of Canada and traveled across Canada, for contributing the above essay.

Please note the condition report for this lot.

ESTIMATE: \$100,000 – 150,000



TOP: LAWREN S. HARRIS
Morning, Lake Superior

oil on canvas, circa 1921 – 1928
34 x 40 in, 86.3 x 101.6 cm
Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1939.686
William Gilman Cheney Bequest

Not for sale with this lot

BOTTOM: LILIUS TORRANCE NEWTON
Elise Kingman

oil on canvas, 1930
30 ¼ x 24 ¾ in, 76.7 x 61.8 cm
Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2008.180
Gift of Margaret K. Carsley, niece of Elise Kingman

Not for sale with this lot