



## 118 Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

### Street, Alert Bay

oil on canvas, signed M. Emily Carr, 1912  
32 × 23 3/8 in, 81.3 × 59.4 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Dominion Gallery, Montreal, on consignment from Emily Carr, titled as *Alert Bay, Mother in Foreground* (A64), August 4, 1944  
Acquired from Emily Carr by Dominion Gallery, Montreal, titled as *Street, Alert Bay*, October 28, 1944  
Captain A.P. Van Stolk, Montreal, October 28, 1944  
Dominion Gallery, Montreal, December 15, 1944  
Laing Galleries, Toronto, April 1, 1945  
Private Collection, Florida, circa 1959  
By descent to the present Private Collection, Toronto

#### LITERATURE

“Miss Carr Replies,” *The Daily Province* (Vancouver), April 8, 1912, page 5  
*Paintings and Watercolours by Emily Carr*, Dominion Gallery, 1944, reproduced front cover and listed  
“Works by Emily Carr at Dominion Gallery,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), October 21, 1944, reproduced  
Iris Smallwood, “Author, Artist, Emily Carr Is Also Fascinating Person,” *The Standard* (Montreal), November 25, 1944, reproduced  
“Emily Carr,” *Canadian Art*, vol. 2, no. 3, March 1945, pages 115 – 119, reproduced  
Emily Carr, *Growing Pains*, 1946, page 309  
Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles According to Location*, National Museum of Canada, 1950, vol. 2, reproduced page 678, titled as *Alert Bay in 1912*, listed page 873  
Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles According to Crests and Topics*, National Museum of Canada, 1951, vol. 1, *Totem Poles*, a description of the whale totem, page 289  
Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography*, 1979, pages 75, 76 and 92  
Paula Blanchard, *The Life of Emily Carr*, 1987, pages 120 and 121  
Doris Shadbolt, *Emily Carr*, 1990, the 1912 oil on canvas entitled *Alert Bay (with Welcome Figure)*, a view of this street from the opposite direction, reproduced page 106  
Ian M. Thom, *Emily Carr in France*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1991, page 28  
Gerta Moray, *Northwest Coast Native Culture and the Early Indian Paintings of Emily Carr, 1899 – 1913*, PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1993, vol. 1, Carr’s trip to Alert Bay and images

discussed pages 251, 254, 257, 273 – 278 and 369 – 372; vol. 2, listed page 15, reproduced E.1/35, unpaginated  
Charles C. Hill et al., *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, National Gallery of Canada, 2006, pages 63 and 107, reproduced page 145, illustration #105  
Gerta Moray, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*, 2006, a photograph of this street by C.F. Newcombe in 1913 reproduced page 88; the 1909 watercolour entitled *An Indian Village* with a view of this street reproduced page 155; the circa 1908 watercolour entitled *Alert Bay*, of this street from the opposite direction, reproduced page 165; the circa 1912 oil on canvas entitled *Totem Pole*, in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, with a close-up of the first totem, reproduced page 173; Carr’s Alert Bay visit discussed pages 86 – 89, 94 – 95 and 124; and her studio works after the trip discussed pages 133 – 135

Sarah Milroy and Ian Desjardin, editors, *From the Forest to the Sea: Emily Carr in British Columbia*, Art Gallery of Ontario and Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2014, culture in Alert Bay discussed pages 52 – 57; a photograph of this street reproduced page 52; and the oil on canvas *Totem Pole (Alert Bay)* reproduced page 53

#### EXHIBITED

Dominion Hall, Vancouver, *Paintings of Indian Totem Poles and Indian Life by Emily Carr*, opened April 16, 1913  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art—Native and Modern*, December 2 – 31, 1927, traveling in 1928 to the Art Gallery of Toronto and Art Association of Montreal, listed as either catalogue #3, titled as *Alert Bay, West Coast*, or as catalogue #11, 22 or 23, titled as *Alert Bay*  
Dominion Gallery, Montreal, *Paintings and Watercolours by Emily Carr*, October 19 – November 9, 1944, titled as *Street, Alert Bay / Une rue, Baie Alert*, catalogue #2  
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, extended loan, 1979 – 1981  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Emily Carr*, June 29 – September 3, 1990, catalogue #25  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, June 2 – September 4, 2006, traveling in 2006 – 2008 to the Vancouver Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; and Glenbow Museum, Calgary, catalogue #32  
Vancouver Art Gallery, extended loan, 2007 – 2017  
Vancouver Art Gallery, *In Dialogue with Carr: Douglas Coupland, Evan Lee, Liz Magor and Marianne Nicolson*, July 1, 2010 – January 3, 2011



FIGURE 1: **EMILY CARR**  
**Alert Bay, Street Scene with Mother in Foreground**  
 watercolour on paper, 1909  
 14 ¾ x 10 ¾ in, 37.5 x 27.3 cm  
 Private Collection  
 Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada  
 Dominion Gallery fonds, box 425, file 2

Not for sale with this lot

A WOMAN WRAPPED in a shawl sits on a blanket in the foreground, keeping a close eye on a toddler. Across the beaten-earth street are two frame houses with sash windows and two tall heraldic poles. Additional figures sit and watch or walk along the street towards a welcome figure that stands at the head of the road, in front of several white buildings. The painting depicts a street in the village of Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island, and the houses faced the waters of Broughton Strait.

Emily Carr's own account of the importance of her discovery of the totems or crest poles at Sitka, Alaska, in 1907 is well known. That trip would be the catalyst for her future mission to



FIGURE 2: Alert Bay, BC  
 Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives, PN 16532

document the monumental arts of the coastal First Nations. But it was at Alert Bay in 1908 and 1909 that Carr produced her first cohesive body of watercolours depicting Indigenous house fronts, poles and village streets.

In her doctoral thesis and resultant book, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*, Gerta Moray has provided the most intelligent and detailed analysis of Carr's early paintings. Alert Bay, or Yalis, grew up after 1870 when a commercial fish saltery was established. Soon a sawmill and cannery were built, attracting Kwakwaka'wakw families from the 'Namgis First Nation and nearby islands who provided the necessary workforce. The village became a thriving centre of economic activity, and it

was visited weekly by the Union Steamship Company and coastal tourists.

Moray has observed that Carr's 1908 and 1909 watercolours of Alert Bay did not focus on individual poles but on village life, as seen in the watercolour of 1909 (figure 1). Here the houses along the northeast end of the street lead to the cannery buildings upper right (figure 2), as identified by Peter Macnair, retired curator of ethnology at the Royal British Columbia Museum. The human element is of equal interest to the monumental sculptures in these early street views, giving a sense of the scale and topography of the village. Nonetheless it is the magnificent Whale Totem at the left that dominates and attracts the viewer's attention and that retained Carr's interest. In 1947 Chief Daniel Cranmer informed ethnologist Marius Barbeau that the whale crest belonged to the 'Namgis chief L'akwagiyilaw, the carver of the pole, and that it was erected around 1900 to 1905, shortly before Carr's first visits to Alert Bay.

Frustrated by her inability to achieve a visual language equal to the subjects that attracted her, Carr left for Paris in the summer of 1910. In France she would make a major breakthrough under the tutelage of the English painter Henry Phelan Gibb. In her own words, she now understood the formal links between the abstraction of Kwakwaka'wakw carvings and the "New Art" she had come to seek. She stated, "I...pulled some of my Indian sketches from the bottom of my trunk & re-painted them cooperating [sic] the bigger methods I had absorbed over here with the bigger material of the west." Moray argues that one of the watercolours Carr reinterpreted in France was a canvas of the Whale Totem, *Alert Bay Totem Pole* (figure 3), a detail of the 1909 Alert Bay watercolour (figure 1). The painting sings in her new palette.

When she exhibited her French paintings in Vancouver in April 1912, Carr reiterated her debt to Kwakwaka'wakw artists in a letter to the *Daily Province*, stating, "Art is art, nature is nature... Our native Indians do not copy nature, yet their carvings inspired by nature are wonderful;... Pictures should be inspired by nature, but made in the soul of the artist."

Carr returned to her Vancouver studio, but she was unable to regain her former teaching job. In her autobiography *Growing Pains* she wrote, "Having so few pupils, I had much time for study. When I got out my Northern sketches and worked on them I found that I had grown. Many of these old Indian sketches I made into large canvases." As Moray notes, almost all of Carr's 1912 Alert Bay canvases can be linked to watercolours painted in 1908 or 1909.

*Street, Alert Bay* was painted in the spring of 1912 and follows the 1909 watercolour quite faithfully. Carr cropped the foreground, bringing the larger figures closer to the viewer. The view is less distanced and more immediate. She retained, though recostumed, the standing woman at the base of the Whale Totem, and added the two figures at the end of the street. The palette has been completely changed. Colour and line are clearer and



FIGURE 3: **EMILY CARR**  
**Alert Bay Totem Pole**  
 oil on canvas, 1911 or 1912  
 27 x 14 ¼ in, 68.6 x 35.9 cm  
 Courtesy of McMichael Canadian Art Collection  
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Max Stern, Dominion Gallery, Montreal, 1974.18.4

Not for sale with this lot

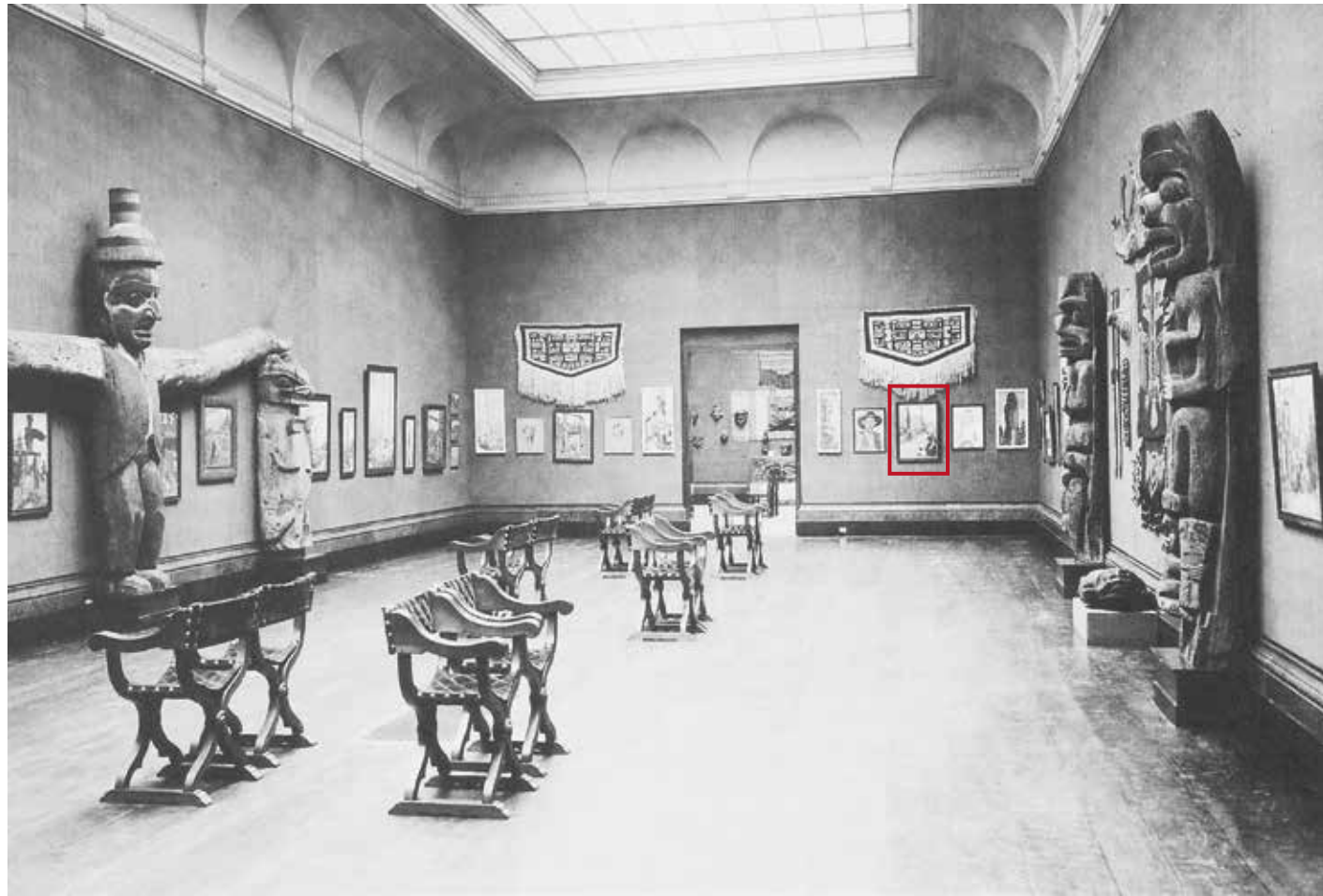


FIGURE 4: *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art—Native and Modern*, Art Gallery of Toronto, February 1928 (our painting showing right of door)

the canvas is full of light. The white and ochre street, framed by blues and greens, moves the eye through the picture plane to the cannery buildings and clouds upper right. Laundry hangs on lines on both sides, the reds and oranges linking the two ends of the composition. The house fronts, painted in modulated tones of cream-yellow, blue, pinks and ochres, almost have the transparency of watercolour. The coloured pattern of the seated woman's shawl is echoed in the monumental Whale Totem and the door and window frames. The shadow of the Whale Totem is treated as blue horizontal bands, responding to the adjacent house.

Carr returned to Alert Bay in the summer of 1912 and more ambitiously traveled up the Skeena River and over to Haida Gwaii. In April 1913 she held a major exhibition of some 200 paintings of "Indian totem poles and Indian life," as she described the subject matter, at Drummond Hall in Vancouver. No list of what Carr showed has been located but we know she did include paintings

of Alert Bay, dismissed by the writer in the *Daily Province* for "cater[ing] to travellers." Most likely this remarkable canvas was included, bearing witness to Carr's evolution in paint.

The economic recession that began in British Columbia in 1913 was aggravated by the war that broke out in 1914. Carr had planned the construction of a house on her father's Victoria property before the recession hit, but the demands of tenants and other means of making a living forced her to stop painting for a number of years. When she returned to painting in the early 1920s, she depicted the landscapes around Victoria, abandoning her native subjects. But in October 1926 she contacted Marius Barbeau, ethnologist at the National Museum in Ottawa, who was then lecturing in Vancouver on the cultures of the First Nations of British Columbia. This resulted in a visit from Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery, and the selection of Carr's paintings for the *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art—Native and Modern*,

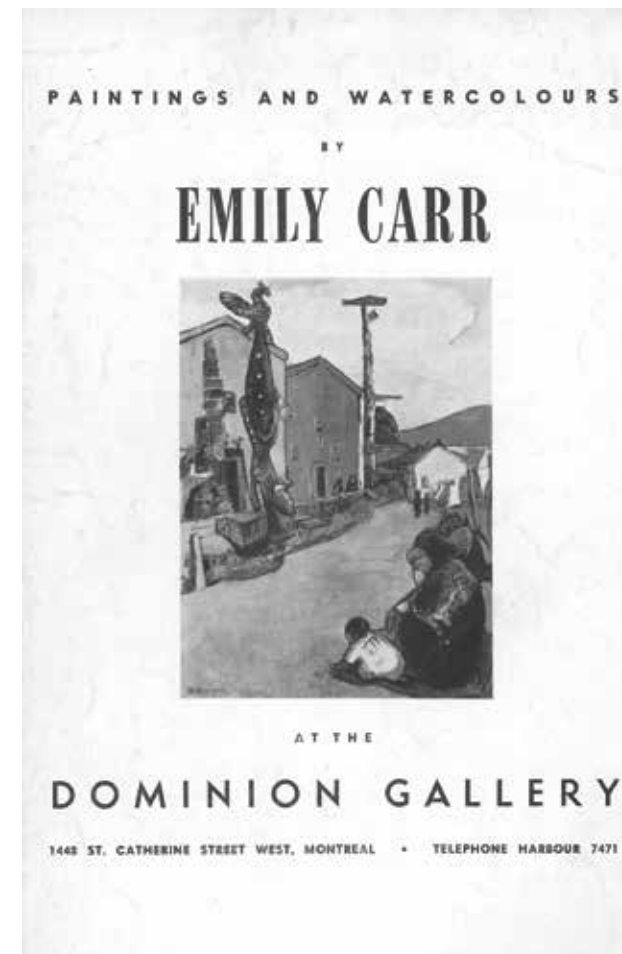


FIGURE 5: Dominion Gallery, Montreal, *Paintings and Watercolours* by Emily Carr, 1944, catalogue cover  
Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada

to be shown in Ottawa in December 1927 and subsequently in Toronto and Montreal. Among the 45 oils and 20 watercolours Carr sent to Ottawa were six paintings of Alert Bay, including one titled *Alert Bay, Village Street*. Four of these Alert Bay paintings were selected for the exhibition, merely identified by location in the catalogue (figure 4). Recognizing the importance of her work, Barbeau arranged to have 34 of Carr's paintings photographed, including *Street, Alert Bay* (CMC 70 038), before the exhibition was sent on to the Art Gallery of Toronto. Nineteen of these were later reproduced in his massive tome *Totems*, published by the National Museum of Canada in 1950 to 1951.

The West Coast exhibition brought Carr to the attention of a national audience and relaunched her career. However, this did not result in a great increase in sales. The bulk of the pre-1914 watercolours and canvases remained with the artist. In the summer of 1944, Dr. Max Stern of Montreal's Dominion Gallery

visited Carr in Victoria. Delighted by her paintings, her low asking prices and the potential for sales, he had Carr ship to Montreal over 80 paintings and watercolours on consignment. A solo exhibition of 59 oils and watercolours was held in October 1944, with *Street, Alert Bay* illustrated on the cover of the catalogue, which was published in English and French for the gallery's clientele (figure 5). On October 28, this painting was sold to Captain A.P. van Stolk of the Netherlands consulate in Montreal, in exchange for a Benin bronze (now in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) plus a sum of money, but van Stolk returned it to the Dominion Gallery in December.

Blair Laing of Laing Galleries in Toronto, undoubtedly having heard of the success of the Dominion Gallery's exhibition and who was in regular touch with Carr's co-executor Lawren Harris, purchased *Street, Alert Bay* and *Cape Mudge Pole* for his gallery in April 1945 following Carr's death. Laing subsequently acquired additional paintings and watercolours by Carr from the Dominion Gallery, and held an exhibition of her work to coincide with the presentation of her memorial exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto in October 1945. This painting was later acquired from Laing Galleries, around 1959, by the family of the current owner.

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada and co-author of *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, for contributing the above essay.

**ESTIMATE: \$2,000,000 – 3,000,000**