



119 Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

Maude Island Totem

oil on board, signed M. Emily Carr, dated 1912 and inscribed *Maud [sic] Island* and on verso inscribed *Queen Charlotte / 21 / #916 / Box 624*
25 ¾ x 12 ¾ in, 65.4 x 32.4 cm

PROVENANCE

Laing Galleries, Toronto
Acquired from the above by a Private Collection, Ontario, 1940s
Sold sale of *Fine Canadian Art*, Heffel Fine Art Auction House, November 23, 2016, lot 137
Private Collection, Calgary

LITERATURE

Emily Carr, "Lecture on Totems," 1913, Emily Carr Papers, BC Archives, Victoria
Doris Shadbolt, *Emily Carr*, 1990, reproduced page 100, included in the National Gallery of Canada exhibition list, unpaginated
BC Archives, the 1912 watercolour for this work entitled *Mountain Goat, Heina, Maud Island* reproduced, catalogue #PDPO0654, <http://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/mountain-goat-heina-maud-island>

EXHIBITED

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Emily Carr*, June 29 – September 3, 1990, catalogue #42

MAUDE ISLAND TOTEM is one of the images Emily Carr brought back from her great sketching trip in 1912 to the northern coast of British Columbia. She visited Haida Gwaii and sketched this pole at Haina (Caynaa 'Ilnagaay), on Maude Island. At its base is carved a sculpin, a bottom-dwelling fish with a huge mouth—hence the creature's expression like a broad grin. The sculpin also has formidable spines, both on its head for protection and on its ventral fins to enable it to cling to rocks. The sculpin crest was used by members of the Eagle moiety, as George MacDonald records, and the pole was erected for a woman of the Pebble Town Eagles. It can be seen in a photograph taken by Richard Maynard in 1888, when the village was still fully occupied.

By the time Carr visited in 1912, only a few poles remained. The devastating smallpox epidemics of the late nineteenth century had forced the remaining Haida population to regroup into two large villages, Masset and Skidegate, although they still used their ancestral village sites for seasonal fishing and hunting. Carr, who lodged with the Anglican missionary at Skidegate, contracted with a high-ranking young Haida couple, Clara and William Russ, to take her by boat to several of the ancient villages and was eager to learn everything she could from them.

Back in Vancouver in 1913 Carr held a huge exhibition, almost 200 paintings, culminating her project to make the most complete record possible of First Nations villages and poles in their original settings. In the "Lecture on Totems" that she gave to explain her native images to an urban audience of newcomers to the region, she stated: "They liked me to paint their poles, and were interested and friendly... It is my custom upon leaving a village to give an exhibition of all the pictures I have with me. I tack them up on the outside wall on one of the houses and invite them to come and see... I find this little courtesy much appreciated."



EMILY CARR

Mountain Goat, Heina, Maud Island

watercolour on paper, circa 1912
10 ¾ x 6 ¾ in, 27.5 x 17.5 cm

Collection of BC Archives

Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives, PDPO0654

Not for sale with this lot

On her visit to Haina, Carr had made some quick watercolour sketches. The presence of tack holes in the oil on board *Maude Island Totem* suggests that it was painted from one of these Haina watercolours when she returned to her base in Skidegate, and that she exhibited it there. The oil panel is similar to the oil studies of single poles she made in Skidegate, using the intense Post-Impressionist colours and bold brushwork she had learned in France a year earlier. Similar clumps of brilliant fireweed also appear in her other paintings of the now deserted Haida villages.

In her lecture, Carr described the boat trip to Haina, "The day of our start was perfect... Skidegate Inlet is lovely... We were followed up almost the entire inlet by large shoals of porpoises who gambolled round the boat with mad antics and made a splendid sight leaping as they did right out of the water. Six and eight abreast on both sides of the boat as if at a given signal." The painting expresses her joy in the landscape as well as her attitude to painting the poles: "You must be absolutely honest and true in the depicting of a totem, for meaning is attached to every line; you must be most particular about detail and proportion. I never use the camera nor work from photos; every pole in my collection has been studied from its own actual reality, in its own original setting, and I have as you might term it been personally acquainted with every pole here shown."

Through this "personal acquaintance" she believed she could convey far more of the spirit and meaning of native cultures than any camera could. Her *Maude Island Totem*, with its powerful spines and expression of sly humour, gazes at us just like the portrait of a person.

We thank Gerta Moray, Professor Emerita, University of Guelph, and author of *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$700,000 – 900,000