



125 **Arthur Lismer**

AAM CGP CSGA CSPWC G7 OSA RCA 1885 – 1969

Mountain and Lake

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1926 and on verso signed and titled on an exhibition label
32 × 40 in, 81.3 × 101.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Laing Galleries, Toronto
Acquired from the above by a Private Collection, Florida
By descent to an Important Private Collection, California

LITERATURE

Catalogue of the Fifty-Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists, 1930, reproduced page 13

EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Toronto, *Ontario Society of Artists, Fifty-Eighth Annual OSA Exhibition, 1930*, catalogue #95, <http://www.ccca.ca/history/osa/>
J. Merritt Malloney's Gallery, Toronto, *Exhibition of Paintings, Sketches and Drawings by Arthur Lismer, A.R.C.A., O.S.A., "Canadian Group of Painters,"* May 4 – 25, 1935, titled as *Mountain, Lake O'Hara*, catalogue #1
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Arthur Lismer: Paintings 1913 – 1949*, January – February 1950, traveling to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, April 13 – May 30, 1950, and traveling to London, Winnipeg, Brandon, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary and Windsor, dated 1930, catalogue #31

FROM GEORGIAN BAY to Algonquin Park, to Algoma and the north shore of Lake Superior, the members of the Group of Seven explored and painted Canada's many landscapes. In 1924, A.Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris traveled to the Rocky Mountains, painting around Jasper in the Tonquin Valley and at Maligne Lake. Independently, J.E.H. MacDonald also painted around Lake O'Hara in Yoho Park, and Frank Johnston, who still lived in Winnipeg, had an exhibition of Rocky Mountain sketches at the Canadian Women's Press Club in Vancouver. Harris and MacDonald would return to the Rockies almost annually through the 1920s. Arthur

Lismer made the trek west in 1928, traveling, as was his habit, with his wife Esther and daughter Marjorie. The train tickets were supplied by the Canadian Pacific Railway, in appreciation of the publicity the resulting paintings would provide to the CPR hotels. Undoubtedly encouraged by MacDonald, in 1928 Lismer painted around Lake O'Hara and Lake Louise. Marjorie Lismer Bridges later wrote in her biography of her father, *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer's Pen and Pencil*,

We spent one summer among the mountains. A number of fine sketches and canvases came out of that trip, but Lismer never went back...I believe that my mother's feeling for the mountains was the reason he never felt the desire to repeat this experience. Mother was usually adaptable to any situation. But I remember when we were in the mountains, at Lake O'Hara, she was upset at their closeness. She preferred the open shore and surf of the sea coast, or the high sky and low islands of Georgian Bay.¹

Lismer did indeed paint some marvellous oil sketches of the Rockies, but only four canvases: *Cathedral Mountain* (48 × 56 inches, collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts); *The Glacier* (32 × 40 inches, collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton); *High Altitude* (also known as *The Glacier*, 32 × 40 inches, collection of Museum London); and our *Mountain and Lake* (also 32 × 40 inches), the only mountain canvas still in private hands.

The scholar of the art of the Canadian Rockies, Lisa Christensen, has identified the subject of *Mountain and Lake* as Mount Odaray viewed from across Lake O'Hara. In the oil sketch that preceded the canvas, entitled *Canadian Rockies*, sold by Heffel in November 2013 (figure 1), the boldly painted forms of the boulders and treetops lower left are painted in tones close to those depicting the lower slopes of the mountain. The spatial distance blurs so that Mount Odaray, cropped at its peak, weighs heavily in the near distance. The freely brushed clouds and the water of Lake O'Hara lead the eye to the more lightly painted slopes of the Odaray Glacier upper left.

Working from the oil sketch, Lismer lightened the overall palette in the canvas. The mountain slopes appear to be more distant, an effect enhanced by the inclusion of Mount Odaray's full height



FIGURE 1: **ARTHUR LISMER**
Canadian Rockies
 oil on board, circa 1928
 12 7/8 x 16 in, 32.7 x 40.6 cm
 Private Collection

Not for sale with this lot



FIGURE 2: **JAMES EDWARD HERVEY (J.E.H.) MACDONALD**
Rain in the Mountains
 oil on canvas, 1924
 48 3/4 x 60 3/8 in, 123.5 x 153.4 cm,
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton
 Bequest of H. L. Rinn, 1955

Not for sale with this lot

and floating clouds above. The brightly painted foreground, the rhythmically brushed foliage of the centre trees and the bare trunk lower right play a more assertive role. The somewhat foreboding weight of the sketch has been translated into an expansive evocation of clear mountain air and sunshine.

Interestingly, the subject of Lismer's canvas is the same as that painted by MacDonald when he first painted in the Rockies in 1924. One of his first mountain canvases was *Rain in the Mountains* (collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, see figure 2), which was exhibited in the January 1925 exhibition of the Group of Seven. As Christensen has written in *The Lake O'Hara Art of J.E.H. MacDonald and Hiker's Guide*, MacDonald's canvas is "a combination of two perspectives on the same vista: the lakeshore view, from the far southwest shore of Lake O'Hara, looking back toward Odaray; and looking the same direction, but from the Opabin Plateau 280 metres above."² While MacDonald's canvas is a blend of two-dimensional design and painting, *Mountain*

and *Lake* is a more painterly and dynamic composition, with the bare trunk lower right echoing MacDonald's arched foreground branch, and the swirling tree in the centre pulling the eye to the Odaray Glacier upper left. MacDonald's lakeshore is a proscenium before a theatre curtain, while Lismer's more elevated view brings the viewer directly into the scene of the action.

Mountain and Lake was included in Lismer's retrospective exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1950. Writing to the curator Sidney Key on November 28, 1949, Lismer dated the canvas 1928, although it was dated 1930 in the subsequent catalogue.³ When the exhibition was shown at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Kathleen Fenwick, the Gallery's curator of prints and drawings, noted all the labels and inscriptions on Lismer's paintings in her copy of the catalogue. The canvas was undated in 1950. In further correspondence in January 1953 with H.O. McCurry, director of the National Gallery of Canada, Lismer erroneously dated this canvas 1926 and

titled it *Mountain, Lake O'Hara*. It was most likely at the request of G. Blair Laing, from whom the father of the current owner acquired this wonderful painting, that Lismer misdated the canvas for an exhibition at Laing Galleries.

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.

1. Marjorie Lismer Bridges, *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer's Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Red Rock, 1977), 56.
2. Lisa Christensen, *The Lake O'Hara Art of J.E.H. MacDonald and Hiker's Guide* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), 35.
3. Lismer to Sidney Key, November 28, 1949, Edward P. Taylor Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000