



29 Edward John (E.J.) Hughes

BCSFA CGP OC RCA 1913 – 2007

Steamer in Grenville Channel

watercolour on paper, signed and dated 2006
and on verso signed, titled and dated
22 ¾ x 30 ¼ in, 57.8 x 76.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the Artist
Barbeau Owen Foundation Collection, Vancouver

LITERATURE

E.J. Hughes: A Retrospective Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1967, the related 1952 canvas *Steamer in Grenville Channel*, BC reproduced, unpaginated

Ian M. Thom, *E.J. Hughes*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002, the related 1952 canvas, titled *Steamer in Grenville Channel*, reproduced page 110

Jacques Barbeau, *A Journey with E.J. Hughes*, 2005, the related 1952 canvas reproduced page 1 and on the dust jacket, listed page 165

Jacques Barbeau, *E.J. Hughes through the Decades: The Paintings, 1936 – 2006*, 2012, titled as *Steamer (Grenville)*, reproduced page 95, and the related 1952 canvas reproduced page 21 and in a photo page 110

Marsha Lederman, “Collector Donates E.J. Hughes works to Whistler’s Audain Art Museum,” *Globe and Mail*, October 6, 2014, the related 1952 canvas reproduced, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/collector-donates-ej-hughes-works-to-whistlers-new-audain-art-museum/article20954483/>

CBC News, “E.J. Hughes Paintings Going to Audain Art Museum in Whistler,” October 7, 2014, the related 1952 canvas reproduced, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/e-j-hughes-paintings-going-to-audain-art-museum-in-whistler-1.2789783>

Jacques Barbeau and Lara Shecter, *E.J. Hughes at the Audain Art Museum*, 2016, the related 1952 canvas reproduced page 49

Robert Amos, *E.J. Hughes Paints British Columbia*, 2019, the related 1952 canvas reproduced page 45

Robert Amos, *The E.J. Hughes Book of Boats*, 2020, the related 1952 canvas reproduced page 59

EXHIBITED

Vancouver Art Gallery, *E.J. Hughes: A Retrospective Exhibition*, October 5 – 29, 1967, traveling to York University, Toronto, November 13 – December 8, 1967, the related 1952 canvas, catalogue #22

IN 1947, E.J. HUGHES was awarded the Emily Carr scholarship by Lawren Harris. This award of \$1,200, a great deal of money for the recently demobilized war artist, provided the means to establish his painting career. Perhaps thinking of Carr’s northern journeys, in 1947 Hughes took a reconnaissance trip on the CPR steamship *Princess Adelaide* to investigate possible painting subjects.

Leaving his wife, Fern, at home, Hughes walked over to Victoria’s harbour to board the ship for a week-long trip to Prince Rupert along the Inside Passage. The *Princess Adelaide* was the first and the largest of the Princess steamships, built in 1919 for the Vancouver–Victoria route. On that voyage, in May 1947, the 290-foot-long ship was being repositioned to the weekly Vancouver–Victoria–Prince Rupert service, taking supplies and passengers to many places along British Columbia’s northern coast.

Working from a moving vessel was not ideal for Hughes. Patricia Salmon reported: “The trip up the inland passage—he said it was horrible. . . . It was usually rainy and dark and he had to work to bring every possible glimpse of colour.” She also mentioned that he was prone to seasickness.¹

Hughes began by making notes in his pocket notebook. Farther north, in Grenville Channel, he made a simple sketch titled *Channel S. of P.R.* [Prince Rupert]. The practice that he had refined in England—field notes and pencil sketches—provided in succinct shorthand what he would need when he set to work later in his studio. From this week away he brought back notes that became the paintings *Cardero Channel* (1956), *Houses at Alert Bay* (1951), *Englewood* (1951) and *Steamer in Grenville Channel, BC* (1952).

While living at Shawnigan Lake in 1952, Hughes acquired from the steamship company a photograph of the *Princess Adelaide*. Combining this with his sketch of Grenville Channel, he made a compositional study of the jaunty little ship making its way north. This was followed by a small yet fully defined tonal study in pencil, which he overlaid with a grid for enlargement. It is this repeated refinement of his image that gives Hughes’s paintings their iconic force.

The resulting oil painting, *Steamer in Grenville Channel, BC* (1952), is now the centrepiece of the Barbeau Owen Foundation’s collection displayed at the Audain Art Museum at Whistler.

Max Stern was delighted with the oil painting when it arrived at the Dominion Gallery and wrote to Hughes: “I received today your painting *Steamer in Grenville Channel* and like it very much, especially the design of the boat with its details, its charming figures and the view which leads us very far into the picture. . . . Very charming indeed are also the red autumn leaves and the brown and greyish tree trunks in the foreground of the painting which give the painting depth.”²



EDWARD JOHN (E.J.) HUGHES
Channel S. of P.R.

graphite on paper, 1974
Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Victoria

Not for sale with this lot

When he reached 80 years of age in 1993, Hughes devoted himself exclusively to watercolours, and in this medium he reconsidered some of his favourite images. After the Dominion Gallery closed in 2000, Jacques Barbeau was able to establish a close connection with the artist, and in the remaining years of Hughes’s life, bought at least 14 new watercolours directly from his studio. *Steamer in Grenville Channel* (2005) was one of last paintings Barbeau received from the hand of the master.

Patricia Salmon always championed these late watercolours, writing in 2004: “Certainly the earliest works are the most arresting. But when an artist has worked all his life on landscapes, and claims to ‘learn something every day,’ it is doubtful that all this accumulated learning will go unsung. His present watercolours are untouchable.”³

We thank Robert Amos, artist and writer from Victoria, BC, for contributing the above essay. Amos is the official biographer of Hughes and has so far published four books on his work. Building on the archives of Pat Salmon, Amos is at work on a catalogue raisonné of the artist’s work.

1. Quoted in Robert Amos, *E.J. Hughes Paints British Columbia* (Victoria: TouchWood Editions, 2019), 46.
2. Max Stern to E.J. Hughes, May 13, 1952, Special Collections, University of Victoria.
3. Unpublished letter to the *Globe and Mail*, January 31, 2004.

ESTIMATE: \$50,000 – 70,000