



126 **James Edward Hervey (J.E.H.) MacDonald**

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA 1873 - 1932

Giants Tomb, Georgian Bay

oil on canvas, on verso initialed and inscribed *about 1912*
Georgian Bay / Thoreau MacDonald / Sept. 58 /
are in his hand and indistinctly by Thoreau MacDonald
 28 ¼ x 38 ¼ in, 71.8 x 97.2 cm

PROVENANCE

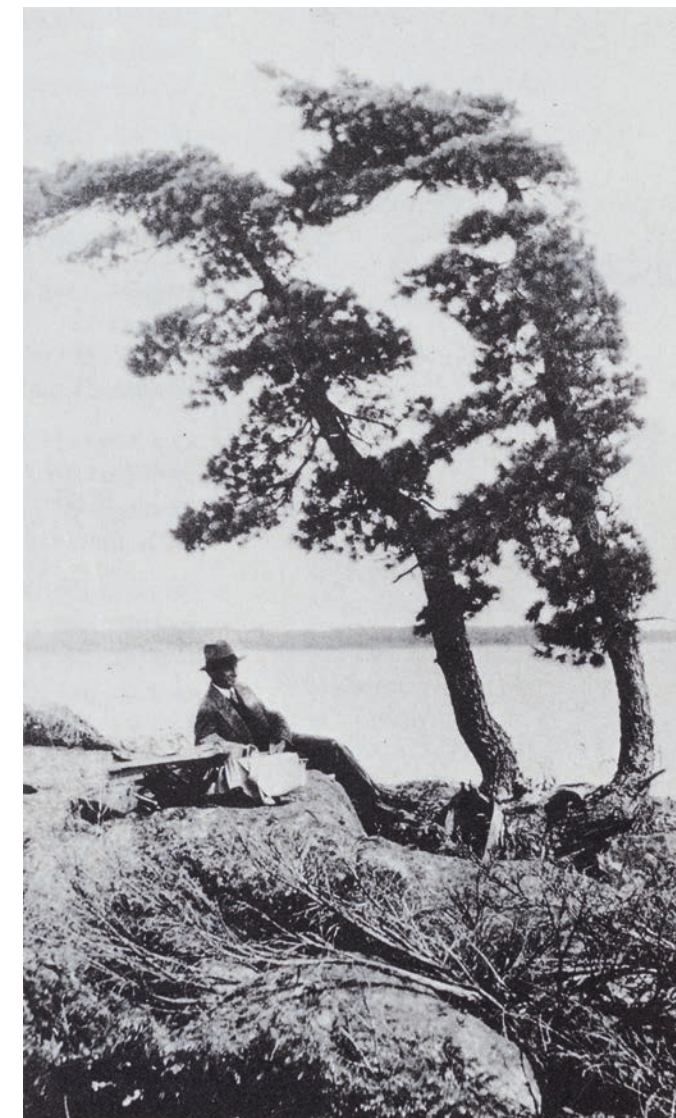
Thoreau MacDonald, Toronto, 1958
 Paul Guy Desmarais Sr., Montreal, 1967
 By descent to Jacqueline Desmarais, Montreal
 Estate of Jacqueline Desmarais

LITERATURE

C.W. Jefferys, "MacDonald's Sketches" and "Generalia," *The Lamps*, vol. 1, no. 2, December 1911, pages 12 and 16
 James MacCallum, "The Outer (Northern) Bay," *The Madawaska Club, Go-Home Bay, 1898 - 1923* (reprinted 1972), pages 49 - 50, and pages 10, 19, 24 and 51 - 52
 E.R. Hunter, *J.E.H. MacDonald: A Biography and Catalogue of His Work*, 1940, pages 7 - 10 and 48
 Nancy Robertson, *J.E.H. MacDonald, RCA, 1873 - 1932*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1965, pages 7 - 10, 13, 21 and 47 - 49
 Dennis Reid, *The Group of Seven*, National Gallery of Canada, 1970, pages 60 - 62
 Paul Duval, *Tangled Garden: The Art of J.E.H. MacDonald*, 1978, pages 24, 35 - 37 and 45 - 46
 John Flood, *Thoreau MacDonald's Notebooks*, 1980, pages 15 - 38
 Pierre B. Landry, *The MacCallum - Jackman Cottage Mural Paintings*, 1990, pages 10 - 17

J.E.H. MACDONALD BEGAN his career as a graphic designer, working for Grip Ltd. in Toronto until 1903, then in London, England, where he worked for Carlton Studios, a design firm established by former members of the Toronto Art League. In 1907 he returned to Grip, where he met fellow artists Albert Robson, Tom Thomson, Frank Johnston and Arthur Lismer, who arrived from Sheffield, England, in 1911. The artists were encouraged to sketch on weekends in the country surrounding Toronto, and MacDonald was soon exhibiting landscapes in the annual exhibitions of the various societies. His first subjects were sketched around his home near High Park and the Humber Valley, in what was then Toronto Junction, and in 1909 he painted at Burks Falls and on the Magnetawan River. The canvases MacDonald exhibited at this time measured about 20 x 28 inches, the larger canvases of 1912 about 28 x 36 to 40 inches, similar to the dimensions of this canvas, which is mounted on a stretcher made by the artist.

MacDonald had associated with the newly formed Arts and Letters Club from its inception in March 1908. That month he designed the club's first recruitment publication, *A Gathering of the Arts*, as well as the club's crest for the first issue of its magazine, *The Lamps* (for Literature, Architecture, Music, Painting, Sculpture), published in January 1910. However, MacDonald, possibly for financial reasons, only became a member of the club in February 1911.



J.E.H. MacDonald sketching, Sturgeon Bay, leading into Georgian Bay



JAMES EDWARD HERVEY (J.E.H.) MACDONALD
Hazy Sunshine, near Split Rock
 oil on cardboard, 1912
 6 x 9 1/2 in, 15.2 x 23.4 cm
 Collection of National Gallery of Canada, Bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944
 Photo: NGC
 Not for sale with this lot

The Arts and Letters Club provided MacDonald with new associates and it was there that he met Lawren Harris, chairman of the club's picture committee during the winter of 1911 to 1912. In November Harris arranged for an exhibition of MacDonald's paintings, an exhibition that was enthusiastically reviewed by C.W. Jefferys in the December 1911 issue of *The Lamps*:

For some years Mr. J.E.H. MacDonald has been known as an exceedingly able designer, but the recent exhibition of his sketches... gave the first opportunity we have had of estimating his powers in landscape painting... To those of us who are interested in the development of a native spirit in art in Canada, the quality of this collection and the appreciation of its significance, ... were equally matters for encouragement. For Mr. MacDonald's art is native—as native as the rocks, or the snow, or pine trees, or the lumber drives that are so largely his themes... In these sketches there is a refreshing absence of Europe, or anything else, save Canada and J.E.H. MacDonald and what they have to say; and so deep and compelling has been the native inspiration, that it has, to a very great extent, found through him, a method of expression in paint as native and original as itself.

Writers have differed in their accounts of when MacDonald first painted at Georgian Bay; however, no Georgian Bay painting by MacDonald dated prior to 1912 has been located, and his

Georgian Bay subjects were exhibited at the Canadian National Exhibition in late August 1912. It was at the Arts and Letters Club that MacDonald met Dr. James MacCallum, who had been invited by his friend Harris to see MacDonald's November exhibition. The doctor was impressed, and it was he who invited the artist to spend time at Georgian Bay. MacCallum became a member of the club in February 1912, after MacDonald's exhibition.

MacCallum had spent part of his youth at Collingwood on Georgian Bay, where he became entranced by the northern Ontario landscape. He studied ophthalmology in London and from 1890 taught at the University of Toronto. In 1898, a group of university professors established the Madawaska Club at Go Home Bay on Georgian Bay, membership being restricted to people associated with the university. While MacCallum had been a member of the club since 1898, it was only in 1905 that he purchased an island north of the club property. He built his cottage there in 1911, the summer before MacDonald's exhibition.

MacDonald spent about three weeks on the bay in July 1912 with his wife and eleven-year-old son, Thoreau. Thoreau kept a diary from July 12 to August 5, from which we know they did not stay at the MacCallum cottage but on a houseboat moored at Split Rock Island in Monument Channel, across from MacCallum's island. An oil sketch by MacDonald of the boathouse, originally used by MacCallum to house his family before he built his own cottage, sold at auction in 2014. Thoreau's diary notes regular visits to Go Home Bay, the arrival of the Madawaska Club's



Lot 126 showing in its frame

supply boat, the *Waubic*, and above all, the animal and marine life around the rocky shoals.

MacDonald's 1912 sketches of Georgian Bay are characterized by low horizons, rocky islands that are mere silhouettes and vast expanses of sky. He worked up his canvases that winter and exhibited *Fine Weather, Georgian Bay* (the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario) with the Ontario Society of Artists in April 1913. Dr. MacCallum acquired another canvas dated 1912, *August Haze, Georgian Bay* (sold at auction in 1998). Two other canvases dated 1913, *Log Pickers* (collection of Museums London) and *The Lonely North* (collection of Empire Company Ltd., Stellarton, NS), have been identified as depicting Go Home Bay. These four canvases were included in E.R. Hunter's catalogue of 1940 but the painting being offered here, identified by Thoreau MacDonald as depicting Giants Tomb Island, southwest of Go Home Bay, was not listed.

Giants Tomb, Georgian Bay is closest to *August Haze, Georgian Bay*. Painted in a similar palette of creamy yellows and soft pinks, both canvases depict an open foreground of water (more developed in the latter) with low, silhouetted islands, a low horizon and vast skies. In contrast, in *Fine Weather, Georgian Bay* figures stand by a gnarled root on rocks in the foreground. The principal subject of *The Lonely North* and *Log Pickers*, however, is not calm waters and vast sky but turbulent clouds, rising majestically in the former and hanging threateningly in the latter. The dramatic effects of cloud formations had long been a preoccupation of

MacDonald's, as seen in *A March Evening* of 1911 (sold at Heffel, November 25, 2004, lot 22) and *Snow Cloud* of 1912 (collection of Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound), and were translated into billowing smoke in *Tracks and Traffic* of 1912 (collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario). In contrast to the serenity of *August Haze, Georgian Bay*, light-crested, thickly painted clouds overhang the calm water in *Giants Tomb, Georgian Bay*. *Hazy Sunshine, near Split Rock*, the 1912 sketch for *August Haze*, bequeathed to the National Gallery of Canada by Dr. MacCallum, includes a sailboat on the horizon as does *Giants Tomb, Georgian Bay*. This canvas appears to stand midway between *August Haze* and *The Lonely North*, an important moment in MacDonald's rapid experimentation during the winter of 1912 to 1913.

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.

This work is accompanied by the original photo-certificate handwritten by Thoreau MacDonald stating: "This painting is the work of my father J.E.H. MacDonald, painted about 1912 - 1913. His initials J. MacD. in his own hand are on the stretcher. The distant island is probably Giants Tomb, Georgian Bay. Thoreau MacDonald, Sept. 8, 1958"

ESTIMATE: \$125,000 - 175,000