



## 223 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

### Colin Range

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled and inscribed with the artist's symbol, 1047T and indistinctly and with the Roberts Gallery inventory #6998 on the gallery label, 1924  
10 ½ x 13 ¾ in, 26.7 x 34.9 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Roberts Gallery, Toronto  
Private Collection  
Roberts Gallery, Toronto  
The Collection of Torben V. Kristiansen, Vancouver

A CENTURY AGO, Lawren Harris visited Canada's Rocky Mountains for the first time, arriving in Jasper in July 1924. Staying at Jasper Park Lodge with his family, he began to explore the area around Lac Beauvert, making initial drawings in pencil and investigating this new subject's grand potential with oil on board sketches. The majesty and abundance of the location meant that at the lodge he soon had "walls all covered with sketches,"<sup>1</sup> but the true exploration of the mountains was just beginning. Accompanied by fellow artist A.Y. Jackson, he would head deeper into the mountains to sketch the wild landscapes that would come to epitomize the ideals of Canadian landscape art, and resonate with his own artistic practice for the remainder of his career. By the end of this first trip he had completed more than 50 sketches, and he would go on to develop some of his most well-recognized and important canvases from this wealth of material.

Leaving the lodge, the artists first set out southwest from the town of Jasper, towards Maligne Lake. This long and narrow jewel of glacial water stretches 22 kilometres between towering



Colin Range from Maligne Lake Road, with Medicine Lake in the foreground  
Photo: Alec Blair

mountain peaks and is the foreground subject for this calm and ethereal work. Harris and Jackson's explorations began at the northern lakeshore, where the artists depicted the various, now iconic, mountain vistas that have come to be synonymous with Canadian identity. Included in these compositions was the view south down the lake, where naturally symmetric, dramatic mountain forms converged with their reflections in the far distance. Harris would turn this spiritually imbued image into one of his most recognizable canvases, the 1924 *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.



Lawren Harris in the Rockies, circa 1940  
 Courtesy of the family of Lawren S. Harris

Searching out more material, the artists, as Jackson describes it, “borrowed an eighteen-foot canoe and paddled about 15 miles to the far end of the lake.” There they hiked the Coronet Creek valley and painted the Brazeau Icefield, in the “weird and ancient country of crumbling mountains and big glaciers.” However, they decided they “liked the look of the Colin Range to the east better” and headed back towards the ranger station at the northern end of the lake to venture further.<sup>2</sup>

It is not clear whether the measured and contemplative sketch *Colin Range* was painted on the initial journey down Maligne Lake or on the way back from Coronet Creek, but it depicts the sight that so intrigued the artists, from a perspective only accessible by boat. To realize the composition as seen here, Harris was on the western shore of the lake, somewhere near the mouth of either

Upper Maligne River or Trapper Creek. The view looks north, and over the placid and cool, silty waters of Maligne Lake we see the distant peaks of the Colin Range, their dramatic slate-grey slabs of Devonian limestone angled sharply. Sirdar Mountain lies in behind on the right side, pale and glowing against the overcast sky. This ridge of peaks lies directly to the east of Medicine Lake and is easily visible today when driving the road to Maligne Lake, which passes directly beneath it. To gain this view, however, one still needs to set out by boat.

An understated, pale palette lends a serene aura to this fine painting. Looking out from the foreground greens of the lake-shore, we follow the subtle variations of blue and purple shifting across the lake’s surface, harmonizing with the shimmering yellows and greys of the sky, which is punctuated by a single



A.Y. Jackson, Lawren and Beatrice (Trixie) Harris (back seat) with companions in the Rockies, 1924  
 Courtesy of the family of Lawren S. Harris

well-defined white cloud. The treed point and more distant far shore are painted with what Emily Carr would later describe as Harris’s characteristic “long, cold greens.”<sup>3</sup>

Amidst all of this lie the beckoning purplish mountains of the Colin Range, the focal point of the composition, calling to Harris and Jackson for exploration amongst their peaks, in their otherworldly atmosphere. “An amazing place, a kind of cubists’ paradise full of geometric formations”<sup>4</sup> is how Jackson would later describe the summits of this range they were on their way to ascend and paint. (The actual peaks they were able to access were a little to the south of this ridge, closer to Maligne Lake itself, and now known as part of the Queen Elizabeth Range.)

After their extensive sketching in the Maligne Lake area, the artists would continue on to explore and paint the area around the Tonquin Valley, and Harris would come home to his studio in Toronto from this first, revelatory trip to the mountains with the aforementioned 50-plus oil sketches (clearly distinguished from later mountain works by their characteristic size of 10 ½ by 14 inches, which fit the sketch box he used until 1924). The mountains of Jasper were where Harris first connected with this subject that aligned closely with his artistic vision, a place where he “found a power and majesty and a wealth of experience at nature’s summit which no travel-folder ever expressed.”<sup>5</sup> It was

a trip with a monumental legacy, both in his long career and in the larger story of Canadian art. For Harris, it was the start of repeated sketching visits to the Canadian Rockies—and a lifelong fascination with the forms and ideas that he found there. For the Canadian public, it created the first examples of the transcendent depictions of mountains for which Harris would become renowned. The works created on this first visit, now 100 years old, still resonate with the excitement of artistic discovery.

We thank Alec Blair, Director/Lead Researcher, Lawren S. Harris Inventory Project, for contributing the above essay.

1. A.Y. Jackson to Norah Thomson DePencier, July 22, 1924, copy of letter in Estate of Lawren S. Harris.
2. A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter’s Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1958), 106.
3. Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1966), 17.
4. Jackson, *Painter’s Country*, 87.
5. Lawren Harris, quoted in Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove, eds., *Lawren Harris* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 62.

**ESTIMATE: \$250,000 – 350,000**