



## 124 Arthur Lismer

AAM CGP CSGA CSPWC G7 OSA RCA 1885 – 1969

### Bon Echo Rock

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1922  
32 ¾ x 26 ½ in, 83.2 x 67.3 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Morris Gallery, Toronto  
Estate of W. Allan Manford, Toronto  
*Important Canadian Art*, Sotheby's Canada, June 2, 2010, lot 12  
Private Collection, British Columbia

#### LITERATURE

Augustus Bridle, "Pictures of the Group of Seven Show 'Art Must Take to the Road,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, May 20, 1922  
Roger Boulet, *A Legacy of Canadian Art from Kelowna Collections*, Kelowna Art Gallery, 2017, reproduced front cover and page 39

#### EXHIBITED

Possibly Art Gallery of Toronto, *Group of Seven Exhibition*, December 1922, titled as *Red Pine, Lake Mazinawe*  
Kelowna Art Gallery, *A Legacy of Canadian Art from Kelowna Collections*, July 1 – October 15, 2017

BON ECHO WAS a defining source of inspiration to Arthur Lismer in the early 1920s. Its dramatic vistas helped shape his development as a landscape painter and played an important role in the early history of the Group of Seven. Situated in eastern Ontario, Bon Echo is dominated by the imposing mass of Mazinaw Rock, a sheer wall of Precambrian granite rising over 100 metres directly from the waters of Mazinaw Lake. Both monumental and enigmatic, its vast rock face bearing ancient Indigenous pictographs, the site had long been regarded as a place of cultural and natural significance. In the early twentieth century, Bon Echo attracted a community of artists, writers and intellectuals drawn to its dramatic setting.

In 1910, the Toronto feminist Flora MacDonald Denison acquired the lakeside Bon Echo Inn. Inspired by poet Walt Whitman, Denison envisioned the inn as a retreat for creative exchange, a place where artists could work in close proximity to one another and to the landscape itself. Under her stewardship, Bon Echo became an important gathering place for many of the figures associated with the Group of Seven. Lismer first visited the site in 1921 at the invitation of Flora's son Merrill Denison. Finding in Mazinaw Rock a subject of extraordinary visual power, he returned the following year. Inspired by its vast vertical planes, fractured surfaces and shifting light, he produced a series of ambitious canvases that explore the site from a range of viewpoints.

The immensity of the site was inspiration to other important Canadian artists: A.Y. Jackson depicted it in *Mazinaw Lake, March, Bon Echo*, 1924 (sold by Heffel in May 2014), A.J. Casson captured it in multiple evocative watercolours, and it was rendered in works by F.M. Bell-Smith, Frank Johnston, J.W. Beatty and Franklin Carmichael, to name a few. The Denisons also enlisted



#### ARTHUR LISMER

##### The Big Rock—Bon Echo

graphite on paper, 1922  
6 ¼ x 3 ¾ in, 15.8 x 8.6 cm  
Mendel Art Gallery Collection at Remai Modern, 1990.13.2.a-b  
Gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges, 1990

Not for sale with this lot



FIGURE 1: **ARTHUR LISMER**  
**The Big Rock, Bon Echo**  
 oil on canvas, 1922  
 36 x 40 in, 91.6 x 101.7 cm  
 Collection of the National Gallery of Canada  
 Purchased 1922, acc. #2004

Not for sale with this lot

Carmichael and Jackson to create advertising images that would bring Bon Echo to the attention of nature seekers.

The present work by Lismer, *Bon Echo Rock*, dated 1922, belongs to this small and important group of canvases executed during Lismer's visits of 1921 and 1922. Among these are *The Big Rock, Bon Echo* (in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, figure 1) and *The Sheep's Nose, Bon Echo* (sold by Heffel in 2010 and now in the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, figure 2). Of these major canvases, *Bon Echo Rock* remains the only example in private hands.

A canvas titled *Red Pine, Lake Mazinawe*, exhibited in the Group of Seven's 1922 exhibition, may correspond to the present painting, whose composition prominently features the distinctive pines noted by contemporary critic Augustus Bridle as "a pair of stumpy, twisted red pines on a rock." While each of Lismer's Bon Echo canvases approaches the subject from a distinct vantage point—ranging from the frontal monumentality of *The Big Rock* to the compact, architectonic structure of *The Sheep's Nose*—our painting is notable for its elevated and immersive viewpoint.

Rather than confronting the rock face directly from the water's edge, Lismer has chosen a position high along the shoreline, looking down across the steep descent to the lake below. This overlook introduces a dynamic sense of movement into the composition, guiding the viewer through a series of interlocking forms. In the foreground, a strong vertical pine trunk anchors the picture plane, its sinuous branches extending laterally to frame the scene. A slender white birch, flecked with autumnal yellow, rises alongside it, while passages of red and ochre foliage brighten the immediate foreground. These elements serve not merely as descriptive detail, but as compositional devices that lead the eye inward and downward, towards the cliff and water.

The rock itself dominates the centre of the canvas, its angular planes rendered in a rich array of ochres, greens and purples. Lismer articulates the surface through a network of faceted shapes, each plane catching light differently, creating a sense of structure and weight while avoiding literal description. The vertical drop of the cliff is emphasized by the sharp transitions between light and shadow, as well as by the abrupt meeting of rock and water below.



FIGURE 2: **ARTHUR LISMER**  
**The Sheep's Nose, Bon Echo**  
 oil on canvas, 1922  
 40 x 45 in, 102.0 x 114.5 cm  
 Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, VAG 2010.7.1  
 Purchased with funds from the Anne Eliza Winn Trust

Not for sale with this lot

Beyond, the expanse of Mazinaw Lake opens into bands of luminous blue and turquoise, providing spatial depth and a striking chromatic contrast to the warm tones of the rock face.

Colour plays a central role in the expressive power of the painting. Lismer employs a high-key palette, favouring bold juxtapositions of complementary hues rather than naturalistic modulation. With the warm, sunlit surfaces of the rock set against the cool blues of water and sky, a vibrant tension animates the entire composition. The brushwork is confident and varied—at times broad and emphatic, at others more controlled—reflecting Lismer's mature ability to balance structural clarity with painterly freedom. Throughout, *Bon Echo Rock* exhibits a strong sense of rhythm, as repeated shapes and colours echo across the surface, unifying the composition.

The Bon Echo paintings mark a period in which Lismer, alongside his colleagues in the Group, was actively defining a new approach to landscape painting in Canada. Rejecting European picturesque conventions, they sought instead to show the essential scale, structure and vitality of the Canadian landscape

through a language of bold colour and simplified form. In *Bon Echo Rock*, this ambition is fully realized. Rather than merely recording a specific place, the painting transforms it into a dynamic arrangement of form and colour, conveying both the physical presence of the rock and the artist's experience of it.

Today, the location in our painting is a provincial park, owned and operated by Ontario Parks. With the other important Bon Echo canvases held in public collections, *Bon Echo Rock* offers a rare opportunity to acquire a work from this important group of paintings. As part of Lismer's sustained interpretation of one of Canada's most celebrated natural landmarks, it stands as a significant achievement in early twentieth-century Canadian art, an evocative and enduring expression of the landscape that helped define a national vision.

**ESTIMATE: \$750,000 – 850,000**