

Heffel

EMILY CARR
ROLL OF LIFE



EMILY CARR



Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

Roll of Life

oil on paper on board, signed Emily Carr and on verso titled on the Heffel label and inscribed on an original label in the artist's hand *Roll of Life no. 20, \$50.00* and *No. 1, \$55.00, Emily Carr 316 Beckley St., Victoria B.C.*
22 ½ x 34 ½ in, 57.1 x 87.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Studio of the Artist
Acquired at the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition
by Dr. Ethlyn Trapp, Vancouver, November 1940
By descent to Dr. William Trapp (nephew of Dr. Ethlyn Trapp),
British Columbia
By descent from the above to a Private Collection, Vancouver
Sold sale of *Fine Canadian Art*, Heffel Fine Art
Auction House, May 23, 2007, lot 170
Private Collection, USA
Sold by Private Sale, Heffel Fine Art Auction House, 2015
Acquired from the above by the present
Private Collection, Vancouver

LITERATURE

Letters between Emily Carr and Ethlyn Trapp, British
Columbia Archives, Parnell Collection, MS2763:420-427,
box 4, folder 61, containing seven letters written between
1940 and 1943
Vancouver Art Gallery Archives, *Emily Carr (Memorial)
Exhibition—Loaned Paintings—B.C. Owners*, borrowed
locally—#9, *Roll of Life*, Dr. Ethlyn Trapp, Vancouver
Vancouver Art Gallery Archives, *Emily Carr Exhibitions: 1938 –
1943*, titles of pictures sold by the Gallery—1940, *Roll of Life*,
\$50.00, Dr. E. Trapp
Emily Carr Memorial Exhibition, Art Gallery Bulletin, volume 13,
no. 9, May 1946
Vancouver Art Gallery List of Exhibitions Log Book: 1946 – 1947,
Emily Carr Memorial Exhibition 697 (locally loaned works)
Doris Shadbolt Fonds, UBC Rare Books and Special Collections,
RBSC-ARC 1492, box 12, file 34, photo #87, Emily Carr
catalogue raisonné research files from 1968, *Roll of Life*
owner listed as Dr. Ethlyn Trapp, West Vancouver
Doris Shadbolt Fonds, box 23, file 16, *Solo Exhibitions During
Carr's Lifetime* (contains the 1940 numbered list of works for
Emily Carr, Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition)—*Exhibitions by
Emily Carr* (Victoria, BC)—20, *Roll of Life*, 50.00
Doreen Walker, *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr*, Nan Cheney
and Humphrey Toms, 1990, various pages with references
to Ethlyn Trapp
David Alexander and John O'Brian, *Gasoline, Oil and Paper:
The 1930's Oil-On-Paper Paintings of Emily Carr*, Mendel Art
Gallery, 1995



Dr. Ethlyn Trapp, 1946
Photo courtesy of West Vancouver Archives

Linda M. Morra, editor, *Corresponding Influence: Selected Letters
of Emily Carr & Ira Dilworth*, 2006, various pages with
references to Ethlyn Trapp
Stewart Jackson, *A Life Not Chosen: The Story of Ethlyn Trapp
and Her Father*, 2009, pages 86 – 89

EXHIBITED

Vancouver Art Gallery, *Emily Carr Solo Exhibition*,
November 5 – 17, 1940, catalogue #20
Vancouver Art Gallery, *Emily Carr Memorial Exhibition*,
May 1 – 26, 1946, catalogue #9
Audain Art Museum, Whistler, British Columbia,
displayed with permanent Emily Carr collection on loan,
September 3, 2018 – June 15, 2021



FIGURE 1: EMILY CARR
Swirl
 oil on canvas, 1937
 27 x 22 3/4 in, 68.6 x 57.8 cm
 Private Collection

Not for sale with this work

ROLL OF LIFE is among the finest examples of Emily Carr's oil on paper paintings, and holds a special importance her life. This work is related to the iconic painting *Swirl* and the closely related oil *Juice of Life* (figures 1 and 2). *Roll of Life* was painted in the same period—the 1930s, and depicts the same sketching area as these related works—Metchosin, located on the outskirts of Victoria. The central theme of the cycle of life in the forest is similar in these three works. In *Roll of Life*, the central element is of two trees, shown with their branches tightly intertwined, dancing together in a pulsating motion. This tree couple is flanked on the right by three younger trees, vibrating in an energetic movement, and to the left of the dancers stand a couple of mature trees looking on. A dense forest of ancestor trees swaying rhythmically in the background oversee the scene. The central stage consists of a field of tawny windswept grass, undulating around and uniting this family of trees. In the near foreground, a large sentinel boulder protects and shelters the entire spectacle. The title was well chosen by Carr, as the lively scene can aptly be called a “roll of life.”

As with *Swirl*, the provenance of *Roll of Life* is superb, and reaches back to its purchase in November 1940 by Carr's close friend, Dr. Ethlyn Trapp. Trapp acquired the painting from the third solo exhibition that Carr staged at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Letters show that much discussion between Trapp and the artist took place about the chosen work. The sale is recorded in the financial records of the Vancouver Art Gallery Archives, and also discussed in various letters written by Carr to close friends around the time of the exhibition. Carr sold few paintings during her lifetime, and only rarely did she sell a painting from one of the many exhibitions in which she participated in, and therefore the sale of *Roll of Life* was an important and well-recorded event for Carr.

Trapp and Carr had a special relationship, which the many existing letters between the two reveal. Trapp named her large estate in West Vancouver Klee Wyck, after obtaining Carr's permission to use the artist's given First Nation name, which means “laughing one.” Trapp wrote to Carr on June 5, 1943 asking if she might name her home Klee Wyck, as she stated “It seems to me entirely appropriate for such a happy place.” Trapp was one of the first radiation cancer oncologists in Western Canada, and was the first women president of the British Columbia Medical Association. Trapp was a trailblazer like Carr, and appreciated the strong symbolism of the life force that Carr skillfully depicted in her later landscape paintings. Trapp bequeathed Klee Wyck—her large home and the surrounding land—to West Vancouver, to be used as a local arts centre and park. The property was used as the location of the West Vancouver Arts Council for decades, and is currently undergoing conversion into a park, with interpretive trails highlighting Trapp's many accomplishments and contributions to British Columbia.

Trapp was a prominent supporter of British Columbia artists, and she owned five Carr paintings, along with many other works of well-known Canadian artists. Among the five Carr paintings in her possession was the closely related *Juice of Life*, which was bequeathed to her by Ira Dilworth. *Juice of Life* was described in Carr's letters as her most cherished painting. She gave it to her closest friend Ira Dilworth near the end of her life, and in their many letters to each other, they discuss the painting. Dilworth must have recognized that Carr's beloved *Juice of Life* belonged together with *Roll of Life*, and he ensured they would be united after his death by bequeathing *Juice of Life* to their mutual friend Trapp. Never married, Trapp left *Roll of Life* to her nephew, the pioneering British Columbia open heart surgeon Dr. William Trapp, with whom she had a great affinity and a close relationship.

Carr never had excess money to spare, but she could be extremely resourceful. She developed a unique painting medium, using good quality white house paint thinned with gasoline or turpentine to which she added the finest pigments she could afford. She created a portable easel that held large 24 by 36 inch sheets of manila paper that she purchased in bulk at a low cost. This unique inexpensive painting medium allowed Carr to experiment with abandon during her many sketching trips around Victoria in the 1930s. The technique was instrumental in the development of a whole new method of artistic expression for Carr—the oil on paper medium allowed a greater spontaneity in her use of fluid sweeping brush-strokes than in her oil on canvas works. As a result, her paintings transformed in the 1930s, with a much greater emphasis on movement and rhythm in her landscapes. This dynamic movement and energy, seen in Carr's best oil on paper compositions, is expertly demonstrated in *Roll of Life*.

While Carr initially used her oil on paper technique solely for *en plein air* sketching, she later employed the medium for masterfully expressive finished paintings. She mounted these finished oil on paper compositions on a backing—gluing them down on plywood and completing them with handmade wooden frames. She traded sketches with the owner of a local Victoria lumberyard for these finishing materials, further keeping her costs to a minimum. *Roll of Life* is one of these accomplished oil on paper paintings, which Carr considered worthy of exhibiting at her solo exhibition in 1940, along with such iconic works such as *Crazy Stair*, *Three Totems* and *Above the Gravel Pit*.

Roll of Life is a masterful painting created by Carr during her mature landscape period. The artist's recurring theme of the boundless cycle of life found in nature is masterfully expressed by Carr's fluid and expressive brush-strokes. The well-documented history of this painting is no less impressive, being one of the few paintings purchased at exhibition during Carr's lifetime by a close and important friend of the artist.

PRICE: \$480,000 CAD



FIGURE 2: EMILY CARR
Juice of Life
 oil on canvas, 1938 – 1939
 25 3/4 x 20 3/4 in, 64.5 cm x 52.7 cm
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

Not for sale with this lot

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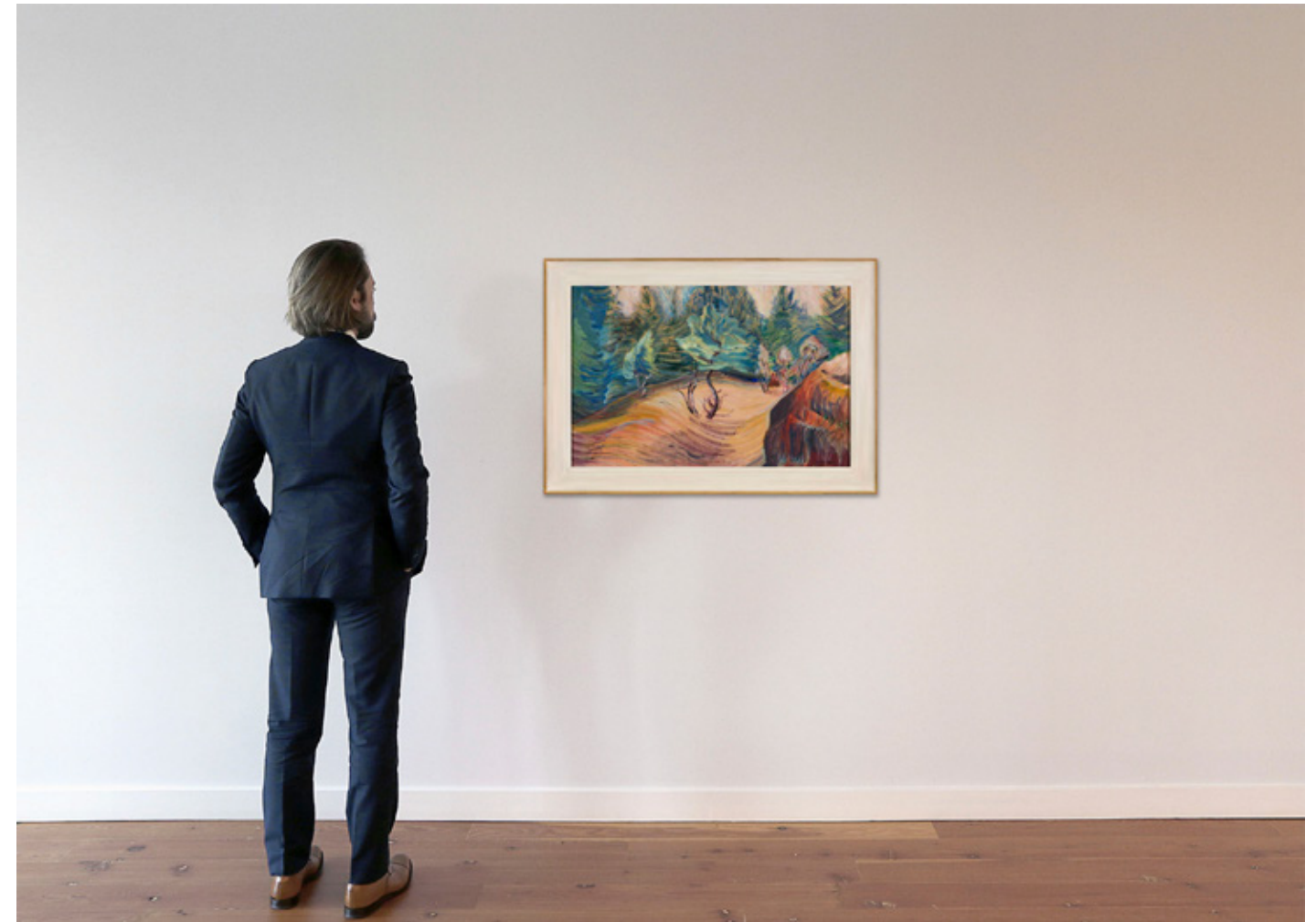
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