



131 Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA RSA 1882 – 1974

Laurentian Hills, Early Spring

oil on canvas, signed and on verso signed, titled, inscribed 275.00 and OSA 1931, Ottawa 1932, Eatons Montreal, CNE 1931, numbered with the Art Gallery of Ontario accession #L69.19 on the AGO labels and stamped 00120 on the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum label, 1931 21 1/4 x 26 3/4 in, 53.7 x 67.9 cm

PROVENANCE

J. Merritt Malloney Gallery, Toronto
J.S. McLean, Toronto, 1934
Gift from the J.S. McLean Collection to the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1969
Donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1988, AGO accession #L69.19

LITERATURE

Ontario Society of Artists: Sixtieth Annual Exhibition, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1932, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, page 10, reproduced page 11

M.O. Hammond, “Canadian Artists Have Large Place in Fine View,” *The Globe* (Toronto), March 5, 1932, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, reproduced page 13
“Arts Club Members Exhibit Paintings,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), November 1, 1932, titled as *In the Laurentian Hills*, page 6
Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada, 1933, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, listed page 13
Graham McInnes, *A Short History of Canadian Art*, 1939, titled as *The Laurentians—Early Spring*, reproduced facing page 66
A.Y. Jackson, introduction, *Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of J.S. McLean*, National Gallery of Canada, 1952, titled as *Laurentian Hills*, listed, unpaginated
J.S. McLean, “On the Pleasures of Collecting Paintings,” *Canadian Art*, vol. 10, no. 1, autumn 1952, titled as *Laurentian Hills*, reproduced page 5
William J. Withrow, *The J.S. McLean Collection of Canadian Painting*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1968, listed, unpaginated
Dennis Reid, *Group of Seven*, National Gallery of Canada, 1970, reproduced page 154, catalogue #161
Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 1st edition, 1973, page 150, reproduced page 151

Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd edition, 1988, reproduced page 154
Anna Hudson, *A Collector’s Vision: J.S. McLean and Modern Painting in Canada*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1999, pages 14 and 72, reproduced page 47
Catherine Mastin, editor, *The Group of Seven in Western Canada*, Glenbow Museum, 2002, mentioned page 121
Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 3rd edition, 2012, reproduced page 162, figure 10.12

EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Toronto, *Ontario Society of Artists: Sixtieth Annual Exhibition*, March 4 – April 1932, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, catalogue #88
The Fine Art Galleries, T. Eaton Co. Ltd., Toronto, *Exhibition of Canadian Paintings*, circa 1932, titled as *Laurentian Hills*, catalogue #34
The Fine Art Galleries, T. Eaton Co. Ltd., Montreal, *Arts Club of Montreal*, October 31 – November 12, 1932, titled as *Laurentian Hills*, catalogue #29
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art*, February 7 – March 6, 1933, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, catalogue #135
J. Merritt Malloney Gallery, Toronto, *A.Y. Jackson*, February – March 10, 1934, titled as *Laurentians, Early Spring*, catalogue #12
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of J.S. McLean*, February 23 – March 24, 1952, titled as *Laurentian Hills*, catalogue #29
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *The J.S. McLean Collection of Canadian Painting*, September 19 – October 20, 1968, traveling in 1968 to 1969 to the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, Charlottetown; Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton; London Public Library and Art Museum; Winnipeg Art Gallery; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Edmonton Art Gallery; and Vancouver Art Gallery, catalogue #32
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *The Group of Seven*, June 19 – September 8, 1970, traveling to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, September 22 – October 31, 1970, catalogue #161
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *A Collector’s Vision: J.S. McLean and Modern Painting in Canada*, May 20 – September 5, 1999, traveling in 2000 – 2002 to the Appleton Museum, Florida; Canada House, London, England; and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax

FEW PAINTINGS IN the history of Canadian art have been reproduced in every edition of Dennis Reid’s standard survey, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*. Many fewer have been available on the open market. Like William Ronald’s *Gypsy* (1959, sold by Heffel on May 24, 2017, lot 32), the appearance at auction of A.Y. Jackson’s *Laurentian Hills, Early Spring* is a rare opportunity to acquire a historically pivotal work with a distinguished provenance that has only been in one private collection.

When J.S. McLean bought *Laurentian Hills, Early Spring* in 1934, this important collector acquired a key work by Jackson when it was still contemporary. A businessman by profession, McLean was the president and founder of Canada Packers Ltd., and his acumen and drive also informed his desire to acquire the best of contemporary Canadian art. He became one of the

period’s foremost collectors of Canadian art, along with C.S. Band, R.S. McLaughlin and Vincent Massey. Ultimately, and as with Band’s collection, much of McLean’s collection went to the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Views of rural Quebec were a mainstay of Jackson’s contributions to the Ontario Society of Artists, Royal Canadian Academy and Group of Seven exhibitions from the early 1920s through the middle 1940s. These views particularly included the Laurentian Mountains—running across southern Quebec from the Ontario border, through Charlevoix County and downriver from Quebec City to Labrador. In March 1931, Jackson broke new ground with his art through his comprehensive knowledge of the region’s light and landscape.

Jackson’s most daring compositions have the least incidental or anecdotal content. By the onset of his artistic maturity in the later 1920s, when Jackson was in his later 40s, he perceived and created form anew. This goes to the heart of Dennis Reid singling out *Laurentian Hills, Early Spring* when he wrote that Jackson achieved something “more complex in its rhythmic structure, and even richer in earth colours” than the artist had before. Like Harris’s *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924, collection of the National Gallery of Canada, #3541), *Laurentian Hills, Early Spring* was influential in how the artist developed and also in how that development was understood.

The composition is divided into distant horizontal zones of foreground, middle ground and background sky. The foreground’s furrows of white and brown are wavy orthogonals creating lateral rhythm and orthogonal thrust. The bisected hills’ horizontal patches of snow and trees in the middle distance decelerate our gaze. Maintaining the warm, earthy browns, while adding sap green and cool blue, Jackson constructs volume and light more than he describes topography and vegetation. The top zone simplifies again—the sky’s warm pale ochre ground infuses the dusty violet sky patched with clouds and the cool ultramarine heaven above.

Never programmatic, Jackson was responsive to his setting. In *Laurentian Hills, Early Spring*, Jackson captured the energized spring light in unique harmony as it played off the furrows of soil and snow in the foreground, the residual patches of snow and forest in the middle distance, and the distant Laurentians, rendered blue in atmospheric perspective. The complex rhythmic structure Reid discusses goes beyond landscape, and includes Jackson as leaping forward as a composer of forms and as a colourist.

In the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, Kenneth Wells observed the consolidation of Jackson’s powers in his review of Jackson’s 1934 exhibition at the J. Merritt Malloney Gallery. It was one of the most important solo exhibitions to be held in Toronto in years, and Wells isolates Jackson’s formal accomplishments when he called his art one of seeing nature as a “series of architecturally arranged forms, and of painting them with a sculptor’s appreciation of those forms.” Instead of getting carried away with painterly affectation, Jackson understood the possibilities and limits of paint and unified the essentials.

We thank Gregory Humeniuk, art historian, writer and curator, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$100,000 – 150,000