



133 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885–1970

Sand Lake, Algoma (Algoma Sketch cxvi)

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled, inscribed with the Doris Mills inventory #2/116 and with the artist's symbol (cross circled) and stamped Kastel Gallery, 1921
10 3/8 x 13 3/8 in, 27 x 35.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Kaspar Gallery, Toronto, circa 1980
Kastel Gallery, Montreal
The Art Emporium, Vancouver, 2006
Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Canadian National Exhibition, *Toronto Catalogue*, 1923, page 41

Doris Mills, *L.S. Harris Inventory*, 1936, Algoma Sketches, Group 2, listed, catalogue #116, location noted as Studio Building

EXHIBITED

Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, August 25 – September 8, 1923, catalogue #269

SAND LAKE, ALGOMA (Algoma Sketch CXVI) depicts a classic Lawren Harris composition, a treed point of land along a northern lakeshore. It draws the viewer into a crisp fall afternoon alongside rippling water dancing under a bright sun and dynamic cloud forms. This motif, now so clearly associated with the contribution of the Group of Seven to Canada's cultural identity, was a favourite for the artist, who used variations of it in multiple canvases, and as the endpapers for his 1922 book of poetry, *Contrasts*.

Algoma, more than any other location, can be associated with the Group of Seven as a collective. No other subject is as

representative of their artistic collaboration as this stretch of forests, rivers and lakes to the east of Lake Superior. With a vision to create an “art expression which should embody the moods and character and spirit of the country,”¹ Harris began in 1918 to organize sketching trips to this northern Ontario region for himself and his fellow artists interested in “paint[ing] the Canadian scene in its own terms.”² The success of these trips catalyzed the creation of the Group of Seven and their inaugural 1920 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto.

The camaraderie found in Algoma was essential to the development of Canadian landscape art. Harris later recounted: “In the evening by lamp or candlelight each showed the others his sketches. This was a time for criticism, encouragement, and discussion, for accounts of our discoveries about painting, for our thoughts about the character of the country, and our descriptions of effects in nature which was different in each section of the country.”³ While the artists initially used a specially converted boxcar on the Algoma Central Railway, on later expeditions they stayed at the ACR's rental cottages—log cabins available for \$1 per day. After several stays at Mongoose Lake, the final trips to Algoma were to Sand Lake, 138 miles (222 km) north of Sault Ste. Marie, “where the country begins to flatten out.”⁴ When this work was painted, in the fall of 1921, Harris was staying there with Arthur Lismer and A.Y. Jackson. Weeks later, Harris and Jackson would venture farther, to the austere north shore of Lake Superior, and Harris would embark on the next phase of his artistic exploration.

In this sketch, we can see a foreshadowing of that transition. For Harris, the focus has shifted from the surface level decorative interplay of foliage and rock patterns seen in earlier Algoma works to a more elemental representation of the scene as a unified whole, allowing only essential forms to communicate the experience of sitting by a placid lakeside. This work succeeds in his goal to depict a “more real sense of the presence of the informing spirit” of this serene place.⁵

All of the original members of the Group, minus Frederick Varley and Franklin Carmichael, participated in the Algoma trips between the autumn of 1918 and spring of 1922, but it was Harris and J.E.H. MacDonald who responded most strongly. MacDonald was lauded for his excellent work there (which Harris called his “best”),⁶ but Harris's own work is easily as important in his own catalogue, and in its contribution to the visual culture of Canada. Important and striking canvases based on these trips are key pieces in public collections across the country, including *Sand Lake, Algoma* (1922), in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

When the Group of Seven held their inaugural show, they were driven by the energy of being like-minded artists on a cultural frontier and the excitement of finding Algoma, which Harris described as “a veritable paradise for the creative adventurer in paint in the Canadian North.”⁷ Today, a century later, we are lucky to still enjoy the fruits of their adventures in paradise. This sketch not only vividly depicts the timeless tranquility of a northern fall day in Algoma, but also is representative of the collective efforts of creative exploration done by the Group. It is part of the Group's important collection of work that still resonates today, and is a testament to their legacy. In the words of Harris, the “effect of our work was to free artists all over Canada, to make it possible for them to see and paint the Canadian scene in its own



TOP: Lawren Harris, design for endpapers of the book *Contrasts*, 1922, Courtesy of Alec Blair

BOTTOM: Typical cottage in Algoma, image included in the Algoma Central Railway pamphlet, circa 1920

terms and in their own way.”⁸ This work is a wonderful example of Harris himself thriving in that freedom.

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

1. Lawren Harris, “The Group of Seven in Canadian History,” *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 27, no. 1 (1948): 31.
2. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove, eds., *Lawren Harris* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 48.
3. Harris, “Group of Seven,” 34.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Lawren Harris, “Creative Art and Canada,” supplement to the *McGill News Monthly* (Montreal, December 1928), 5.
6. Harris, “Group of Seven,” 34.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 38.

ESTIMATE: \$150,000 – 250,000