



122 Cornelius David Krieghoff

1815 – 1872

Quebec Farm

oil on canvas, signed, dated 1856 and inscribed *Quebec* and on verso inscribed variously
22 ¼ x 31 ¼ in, 56.5 x 79.4 cm

PROVENANCE

Scott & Sons, Montreal
Acquired from the above by Miss Helen Norton,
Quebec, before 1934
Collection of Peter and Franca Winkworth, London
Sold sale of *The Winkworth Collection: A Treasure House of Canadiana in London*, Christie's South Kensington,
April 1, 2015, lot 307
Private Collection, Switzerland

LITERATURE

Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff: Pioneer Painter of North America*, 1934, mentioned page 51, listed page 81 and described page 105, reproduced opposite page 6
J. Russell Harper, *Kriehoff*, 1979, page 78, reproduced page 81

QUEBEC FARM IS a distinguished example of Cornelius Krieghoff's well-known motif of a genial exchange between French-Canadian settlers in an inhabited rural setting in winter. In its way, it is the most Canadian of artworks by a profoundly Canadian creator.

The contemporary and nuanced character of Krieghoff's Canadianism can be only outlined in an essay. In brief, it is engaged in its moment, pragmatic and responsive. Krieghoff was an immigrant to North America decades before Canada's Confederation in 1867, who died in the United States five years after that year. From the 1840s to the 1860s he created images of Canada, particularly French-Canadian settlers and Indigenous inhabitants, that influenced the perception of this period for generations. He was born in Amsterdam in 1815, and his family moved to Germany when he was a child. By the time he was 22, he was in New York, where he enlisted in the United States Army. Krieghoff arrived in Montreal by 1846, partly formed artistically and fully ambitious. He had been painting professionally, although the work was crude compared with what it would be one decade later, when he painted *Quebec Farm*.

Central to *Quebec Farm* is an encounter between a French-Canadian settler driving a *berline-barque* with his wife,

daughter, son and infant, and another settler on snowshoes before a frozen stream in an inhabited rural setting. Background scenes accentuate the tableau on the right and left. On the right is a prosperous farmhouse with porch, attic and attached hayloft, with an empty farm sleigh in front. A woman in a red skirt and blue blouse has turned away from the viewer to approach the front door. To her right, and closer to the viewer, is a toddler in a pale yellow tunic, pulling a child's sleigh. Along with the woman in red on the *berline*, the toddler is the only other person directly engaging the viewer. On the left, opposite the stream, slightly deeper into the land, a single hunter with his rifle on his shoulder walks away.

Except for the family in the *berline*, the relationships between the figures are unclear. What is clear is that Krieghoff took great care to choreograph each figure, in a landscape that is unmistakably southern Quebec, near Quebec City, within 50 kilometres of the St. Lawrence River. After his move to Quebec City in 1853, he placed the figure in the landscape in a new way. The figures are deeper in the landscape and more enveloped by it. Krieghoff translated his first-hand experiences as a hunter and recreationalist into paint, resulting in greater and more acute attention on the landscape and atmosphere. Most profoundly, Krieghoff's skies capture their time and place in ways that continue to ring true. A painting like *Quebec Farm* exemplifies the height of Krieghoff's achievement, and makes clear how he transposed the atmosphere and landscape of Canada into art.

Kriehoff crafted compositions that contained and circulated the viewer's eye by setting the principal activity in a lozenge defined by diagonals in the bottom left and right corners, and active skies. He adroitly shepherds our view across the painting's primary scene, and back into the painting's ancillary scenes, all of which action takes place under a sky constituting more than half of the composition. His dynamic sky reinforces the composition, thrills the viewer and describes the phenomena of a mid-winter sky in southern Quebec for his primarily English clientele, who experienced Canada as exotic, foreign and a temporary experience.

Notable names pepper the provenances of historic artworks. Ears prick up when one appears and buzz when more appear, and *Quebec Farm* creates this effect. Its first documented private owner, Helen Norton (1876–1967), was the daughter of Arthur Osmere Norton, a businessman from Coaticook, in Quebec's Eastern Townships. His eponymous firm, A.O. Norton, manufactured industrial jacks in the late nineteenth century, as economic and industrial growth exploded in eastern Canada and the north-eastern United States. The firm's success earned the family its fortune—and fueled its philanthropy.

As is often the case, the inheritors of that fortune collected art more assiduously than their forebears, and Norton's daughter and son, Harry, established even more notable collections of their own. Harry was a trustee of Bishop's University, an honorary president of the Art Association of Montreal (now Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) from 1939 until his death in 1948, and a significant collector of antique glass. Helen Norton collected Canadian painting, and the MMFA exhibited works from her collection in 1961. The siblings' financial support of the AAM's building campaign in 1938 led to its feature staircase being named after them.



Quebec Farm in the Winkworth frame

Collecting was a trait also inherited by Peter Winkworth (1929–2005). Winkworth developed a collection of Canadian art and material culture of historic size and ambition. One tranche of more than 4,000 works in various media, spanning 1565 to 1971, was acquired in 2002 by the National Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada). In 2008, another tranche of more than 500 items was acquired by LAC, and in 2015 it acquired a third tranche. In addition to his collecting, Winkworth contributed to the scholarship on Canadian art, and in 1972 prepared the authoritative catalogue on Krieghoff's prints.

Quebec Farm is a work of multiple rarities. It is a major work without a documented exhibition history. It was not loaned to the landmark Krieghoff touring retrospective exhibitions of 1934 and 1999–2001. Notwithstanding its absence from the major exhibitions, *Quebec Farm* has been published and reproduced in some of the most thoroughly documented monographs on the artist. Well known and seldom seen, *Quebec Farm* was preserved by two different owners for nearly a century. An archival photo of the Norton residence taken in 1942 shows it in a Louis XIV dealer's frame, almost certainly made and put on by art dealer William R. Watson in the early 1930s. Winkworth likely reframed the painting in its current nineteenth-century English neoclassical frame to present it in the aesthetic of Krieghoff's principal clientele, a setting more contemporary with the painting, and with less visual clutter to interfere with it. The changes to the frame and its layers of meaning are a window into Canada's nineteenth century, and Krieghoff's complicated and nuanced identity. This exemplary painting, by the "father of the fine arts in Canada," is the most Canadian of artworks, with a most distinguished national and international provenance.

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

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 400,000