



32 Alexander Colville

PC CC 1920 – 2013

Dog and Horse

glazed tempera on board, on verso

signed, titled and dated 1953

15 x 20 in, 38.1 x 50.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the Artist by Laurence and

Gwendolyn Black, New Brunswick

By descent to the present Private Collection, Nova Scotia

LITERATURE

Nigel Dennis, “Adrienne Had a Midi Time,” *New York Times*

Book Review, August 28, 1960, reproduced page 4

David Burnett, *Colville*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983,

reproduced page 109, listed page 245

Andrew Hunter, editor, *Colville*, Art Gallery of Ontario,

2014, reproduced page 129, listed page 143

EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Colville*, August 23, 2014 –

January 4, 2015, traveling to the National Gallery of Canada,

Ottawa, April 24 – September 7, 2015, catalogue #35

ALEX COLVILLE REMAINS one of the most celebrated artists in Canada. Since his death at age 92 in 2013, as during his lifetime, hundreds of thousands of people have attended his exhibitions, seen his work on book covers, and enjoyed documentaries about him. The early 1950s were a heady time in Colville’s long and distinguished career. Both his success and his main themes trace to this period. On his first trip to New York City, in May 1952, he secured commercial representation at the Hewitt Gallery. Colville held successful exhibitions there in 1953 and 1955. He produced some of his most notable paintings at this time, including *Nude and Dummy* (1950), *Child and Dog* (1952), *Soldier and Girl at Station*, and *Man on Verandah* (both 1953). In a recent book on the artist, Ray Cronin details how the carefully wrought works of the 1950s “show the themes and direction he would pursue for the next six decades: his family, his home, the environs of Sackville or Wolfville... The relationships between humans and animals, and men and women, also become predominant themes. These binaries were important for Colville: “The painting starts to work... when two elements appear to throw light on each other,” the artist wrote.¹

Dog and Horse establishes just this sort of simple yet profound relationship. The sharply contrasting coats of the tawny horse and black dog accentuate their chance interaction. Connections and differences between these animals abound. The dog is trotting by the horse and yet turns sharply to look at the larger animal. The canine form is about torsion and a moment in time, in contrast with the passive horse at pasture. Yet they are connected to one another and to the earth; the colour of this turf glints in the dog’s dark coat, bonding it to the earth-coloured horse as well. Their respective tails again suggest the opposition of activity and calm: the dog’s tail moves to balance his movement while the horse’s is hanging still. As we see in Colville’s preparatory drawing, the dog wears a collar. This element is made more prominent



ALEX COLVILLE

Study for Dog and Horse

ink, pencil and wash on paper laid on card,

dated Dec. 13, 1952

9 x 12 inches, 22.9 x 30.5 cm

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Not for sale with this lot

in the final version of the work, emphasizing that the dog is a pet—the Colvilles’, we glean from other images—perhaps out for a walk. That the horse is also domesticated is suggested by the field in which it grazes, one crossed by the human infrastructure of telephone poles.

Many of Colville’s early pictures are of horses, so much so that he was by the 1950s identified as specializing in such portraits. The woodcut *Horses in Pasture* (1949, lot 33 in this sale) is a fine example of his interest in this animal and reinforces an understanding of *Dog and Horse* as fundamentally concerned with inter-animal contact. The standing and recumbent horses seem to be “close” in a human way, but this is anthropomorphizing on the part of the viewer. Colville is typically more concerned with the mystery of what humans cannot understand than by the possibility of equine communication.

Thinking by the early 1950s that he needed to be less specialized in his choice of animals to depict, Colville often depicted both dogs and horses with people (*Girl on Piebald Horse*, lot 24 in this sale, and *Child and Dog*, both 1952). Perhaps his most famous painting from this period, *Horse and Train* of 1954 (reproduced page 49), again constructs a binary encounter for us to ponder. On the one hand, then, it is special to see only animals interact in *Dog and Horse*, the preparatory study, and *Horses in Pasture*. Their sympathy is conveyed by details in the 1953 painting. As we see in the carefully calibrated details of the accompanying drawing as well as the resulting painting, for example, the dog’s right ear and the horse’s left ear are carefully calibrated to slant ever so slightly towards one another. We could read this as a gesture of interspecies sympathy. Yet,



Laurence and Gwendolyn Black, the original owners of *Dog and Horse*, with their children Janet and John, and their black lab, Missy
Courtesy of the Consignor

characteristically for Colville, here, more than in *Horses in Pasture*, people are implicated in what is only initially a dualism. We are encouraged to observe this fleeting relationship between animals, one that is both mysterious because it differs from our modes of communication, yet also consoling in its suggestion of a larger harmony that Colville called “grace.” In a lecture in 1951, he declared that his most important values were “humanity” and “mystery.” *Dog and Horse* memorably conveys both these qualities.

We thank Mark A. Cheetham, Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto and author of *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed*, for contributing the above essay.

1. Ray Cronin, *Alex Colville: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2017), 11.

IT WAS A shared love of animals that drew the painting’s original owners to this very special work by Alex Colville in the early 1960s. Prominent businessman Lt. Col. J. Laurence “Laurie” Black ED, LLD and his beloved wife Gwendolyn “Gwen” Black BMus., LLD, OC were important members and very generous supporters of the Sackville community and Mount Allison University, where both were granted honorary doctorates, and served on the university’s Senate and Executive Committees.

Among their many philanthropic initiatives, Laurie and Gwen supported different facets of the institution; Gwen had a particularly strong connection to the Faculty of Music, where she received her degree and numerous recognitions. It was thanks to this defining affiliation that the Blacks crossed paths with Colville, whose home and studio were located on the university campus. Laurie and Gwen developed a friendship with Alex and Rhoda Colville, and their lives were connected in more ways than one. In fact, Laurie’s uncle Herb Wood was the subject of Colville’s *Mr. Wood in April* (1960), painted in front of what was then his family home, later purchased by Mount Allison University for the official residence of the president.

When Laurie and Gwen were deciding on a painting for their collection on a visit to the artist’s studio, *Dog and Horse* was one of several exceptional examples that caught their eye. The decision came down to this work and the now-iconic *Horse and Train* (1954), but it was the warmth and calmness of *Dog and Horse* that solidified their choice. They hung it prominently and proudly in their welcoming home, where it was enjoyed by friends and family for more than 50 years.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000



33 Alexander Colville

PC CC 1920 – 2013

Horses in Pasture

woodcut on paper, signed and dated 1947
on the mat and on verso titled and inscribed
woodcut—only print and 825
5 × 7 in, 12.7 × 17.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Nova Scotia

ALEX COLVILLE BECAME expert in a range of art print techniques through his long career. His serigraphs (silkscreens) and woodcuts display the same qualities of observation, stillness and import as his paintings and are central to his reputation. Prints have the double virtue of being accessible to a wider audience and, especially in the case of this woodcut, using a restricted and thus highly focused palette. *Horses in Pasture* was inspired by the earlier painting *Horses in Field* (1946). But like his serigraphs, the woodcut is a unique composition. Through line, tone and restricted colour, it focuses our attention on the two horses and makes their presence more dramatic than in the 1946 painting.

Without suggesting a linear progression from Colville’s earlier paintings of horses, the woodcut suggests his growing separation

from his work as an official war artist during World War II and related work on his return to Canada. Colville had witnessed horrors in Europe, including seeing and depicting corpses at Belsen concentration camp in April 1945. He completed large-scale works about the war at home in 1946. The pastoral—even innocent—*Horses in Field* was also painted in 1946, but by an artist now seeking quiet and stability as he moved into a teaching position at Mount Allison University, in Sackville, NB. The woodcut *Horses in Pasture*, by contrast, takes what we read as the relationship between these animals as its sole focus, removing them from their bucolic setting. Resemblances aside, its maturity allies it with *Dog and Horse* of 1953 more than with Colville’s earlier painting.

We thank Mark A. Cheetham, Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto and author of *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed*, for contributing the above essay.

This work is in the original frame made by Colville. The full sheet size measures 5 ½ × 7 ½ inches.

As noted on verso, this is the only print made of this image. The original woodblock for this work is located in the National Gallery of Canada Archives.

ESTIMATE: \$3,000 – 5,000