



## 128 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

### From Berg Lake, Evening

oil on board, on verso signed twice, titled variously and inscribed *Six Sketches of Mount Robson*, *Mountain Sketch IX* and *25 Severn St.* and with the Doris Mills Inventory #7/4, circa 1929  
12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the Artist, with the assistance of Lawren P. Harris, by Norah Lyle, Toronto, circa 1936  
By descent to the present Private Collection, New York and Victoria

#### LITERATURE

Doris Mills, *L.S. Harris Inventory*, 1936, Rocky Mountain Sketches, Group 7, catalogue #4, location noted as the Studio Building, and a drawing of the painting illustrated by Hans Jensen

Jeremy Adamson, *Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes, 1906 – 1930*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1978, a similar oil entitled *Mount Robson from Berg Lake* reproduced page 174

Lisa Christensen, *A Hiker's Guide to the Rocky Mountain Art of Lawren Harris*, 2000, the circa 1924 – 1929 graphite drawing for this work entitled *Mount Robson* (accession #18712), collection of the National Gallery of Canada, reproduced page 33

Steve Martin, Cynthia Burlingham and Andrew Hunter, *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris*, 2015, a similar oil entitled *Mount Robson from the Northeast*, in the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, reproduced page 109

#### EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Toronto, Ontario Society of Artists, *Little Pictures*, December 1930, catalogue #469  
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, on loan from 2015

LAWREN HARRIS'S *From Berg Lake, Evening* is an exceptional and striking work, an absolute triumph of the artist's ability to capture the underlying spirit of the Canadian landscape and translate it into tangible form. Set against an entrancing deep indigo sky, Mount Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, is the subject of this transcendent oil sketch, with its massive glaciers and snow-covered slopes radiating an otherworldly glow in the dying light of the day. This crystalline portrait of solemnity, stillness and power, distilling the massive scale and grandeur of the "Monarch of the Canadian Rockies" to within the bounds of a 12 x 15 inch beaverboard panel, is a testament to Harris's remarkable artistic vision, and a superb example of his finest work in the mountains. In 1933, Harris wrote that "the arts epitomize, intensify and clarify the experience of beauty for us, as nothing else can," reiterating what paintings such as this demonstrate so effectively: the power of creative work to reveal the underlying spirit of the world around us, and foster a newfound pathway to deep appreciation.<sup>1</sup>

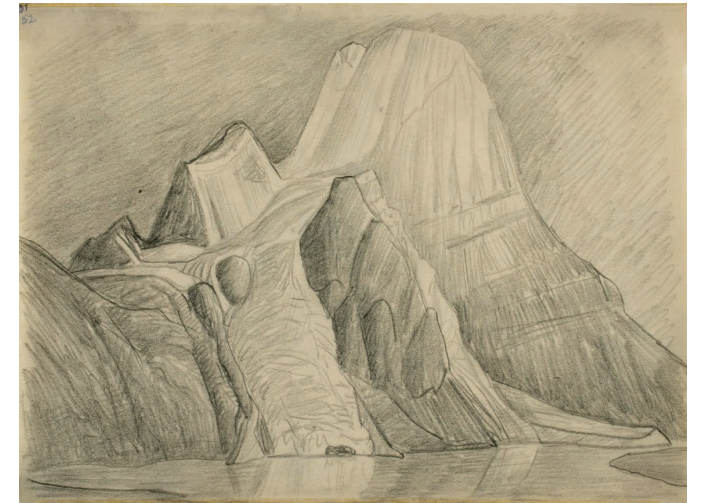


FIGURE 1: LAWREN STEWART HARRIS

### Mount Robson

graphite on wove paper, circa 1929  
12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm

Collection of the National Gallery of Canada

Not for sale with this lot

Harris's landscape paintings of Canada have mesmerized and captivated collectors and the public for over a century. His diverse subjects, ranging from the abundant vitality of Algoma's rivers and lakes to the austere desolation of Lake Superior's burnt-over North Shore, and from the calm comfort of decorative snow-covered forests to the drama and humanity of vibrant urban scenes, hold places of importance in Canadian cultural history. Yet no subject carries quite the same significance and immediate association with the artist as the Rocky Mountains. As Harris's work evolved in the 1920s, shifting from subject to subject, his style also progressed, following a trajectory where he became, in his own words, "more vigorously selective, and [I] sought to have no element, no line or colour in the picture that did not contribute to the unified expression. This led to the utilization of the elements of the North in three dimensions—an organization in depth, giving a still fuller meaning, a still deeper significance to every form and to the relationship of all the forms in the picture."<sup>2</sup> Harris was able to apply this disciplined and deliberate methodology effectively in the mountains. There, the topographical legacy of geological change provided abundant diverse and fascinating forms, allowing for an almost sculptural approach to compositions, at a scale where detail and decorative patterns could be eschewed in service of representing the indwelling spirit of the landscape instead.

The Rocky Mountains provided the inspiration for many of Harris's most well-known and highly revered works of art, and



Lawren Harris above Lake Louise, 1946  
Courtesy of the family of Lawren S. Harris

*From Berg Lake, Evening* is a stunning addition to this oeuvre. Held in a private collection since it was acquired directly from the artist's studio in the mid-1930s, it emerges confidently holding its own among iconic compositions like *Mountain Forms* (sold by Heffel November 23, 2016, lot 118), *Mount Lefroy* (McMichael Canadian Art Collection), *Mount Robson*, (McMichael Canadian Art Collection) and *Isolation Peak* (Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto). All of these works represent Harris at the pinnacle of his career, and all were completed within a few years near the end of the 1920s. In fact, despite the lasting legacy and impact of Harris's mountain works, the artist made only four or five sketching trips to the Rockies during his landscape period. Beginning with a trip to Jasper in 1924 alongside A.Y. Jackson, Harris then returned regularly for several summers, continually expanding his explorations and culminating in a final visit in 1929, during which he spent most of his time in Mount Robson Provincial Park (created in 1913, it was British Columbia's second provincial park).

It was this last trip in 1929 from which this work originates. Harris's main base during his time at Robson was most likely the Berg Lake Chalet, opened in 1927 by Roy Hargreaves on the shores of the eponymous lake which lies at the base of Robson,

over 20 kilometres in from the railway line below. Harris's artistic output from this trip is quite prolific. He explored all around the lakes, glaciers, ridges and mountain passes in the area, and mapping his sketching locations clearly demonstrates his skills as an intrepid mountaineer and adventurer—he ranged far beyond where today's hiking trails would take one in the park. In these conditions, while Harris was still working on his oil on board sketches in the field, the role of the pencil sketch became much more prominent as an initial means to capture the abundance of material in situations where carrying multiple sketching panels, or stopping to paint in fast-changing mountain weather, might prove to be challenging.

The partially disassembled *Sketchbook 6*, in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario (and the now widely distributed other drawings that once completed it), constitutes much of Harris's work from this 1929 trip. One drawing, *Mount Robson* (figure 1), now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, matches *From Berg Lake, Evening* as a direct predecessor and related work. The pencil sketch, with its sense of sublime tranquility, perhaps originates from the end of a long day of exploration, with Harris viewing the last of the evening light shining on Mount Robson as he descended back towards his camp after a trip high in the



FIGURE 2: LAWREN STEWART HARRIS  
**Mount Robson from Berg Lake**  
oil on board, circa 1929  
12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm  
Private Collection

Not for sale with this lot

alpine sketching places like Hargreaves Glacier, or the views from Mount Munn and Mount Anne-Alice. Harris would have returned to camp with a sketchbook full of ideas, and perhaps worked up the oil sketch by the lakeside, or saved it to revisit later back in his studio in Toronto, where he could give careful consideration and attention to its many refined elements. The delicate treatment of the deep blue-green water and its soft reflections of Tumbling Glacier, the subtle ombre along the western slopes below the Emperor Face, where the cool white of the snow transitions into the warm maroon brown of the rock, and the precise brushstrokes used to delineate the essential geometry of the mountain: all of these components demonstrate that this is truly a masterpiece that demonstrates Harris's stellar technical prowess and his clarity of vision.

*From Berg Lake, Evening* is one of six depictions of Mount Robson that Harris exhibited as a series of panels in late 1930, showing the varied profiles and moods of the mountain. This work is naturally paired with *Mount Robson from Berg Lake / From Berg Lake, Morning* (figure 2, sold by Heffel November 23, 2016, lot 209). Both are powerful portraits of majesty with similar compositions, and comparing the two reveals Harris's expert wielding of light and colour to create atmosphere, with the

glowing darkness of evening and comforting rich tones being the perfect complement to the brilliant and sharp light of the graceful morning scene. The other works in this series include the often published *Mount Robson from the Northeast* (the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario) and the sketch for the aforementioned canvas at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, *Mount Robson*. As a series, these six mountain paintings, with their notable integration of an increasing abstraction of the natural landscape, could alone secure Harris's legacy as a leader in defining a uniquely Canadian visual language. Taken as a part of his wider and diverse catalogue, *From Berg Lake, Evening* is an outstanding addition to the evidence of Harris being one of the most important and fascinating artists in Canada's history.

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

1. Lawren Harris, "Theosophy and Art," *The Canadian Theosophist* 14, no. 5 (July 15, 1933), 129.
2. Lawren Harris, quoted in *Lawren Harris*, ed. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 51.

ESTIMATE: \$700,000 – 900,000