



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

**Art market** // News

### Lawren Harris leads the way in Heffel's all-Canadian marquee spring auctions in Toronto

Works by Group of Seven members Franklin Carmichael and Arthur Lismer, plus Emily Carr, topped the Canadian auction house's two-part evening sale

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It was not a hockey game, but one could almost hear the strains of the national anthem, “Oh, Canada”, as bidding began at the Heffel Fine Art Auction House’s spring sales in mid-town Toronto on Thursday night (22 May). A total of 85 lots were on offer, all by Canadian artists, including a handful of Group of Seven members, with an estimated value of C\$18m to C\$22m (\$12.9m-\$15.8m).

Pelting rain and persistent concerns about tariffs, trade wars and a recession did little to dampen the mood. The two-session sale—post-war and contemporary art, followed by Canadian, Impressionist and modern art—realised C\$22m (including fees), even despite a high-priced Jean Paul Riopelle work from 1952 failing to sell. That result was in line with the equivalent sales last November and one year ago, which brought in C\$22.7m and C\$22.6m, respectively.

Heffel’s past spring and autumn evening sales have often included a few choice works by foreign artists (past lots by Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse come to mind), but last night it was nothing but homegrown talent—what auction house president David Heffel called “our cultural DNA”. Fittingly, Heffel had labelled the sale “Made in Canada”.

“Tonight was a true celebration of Canada,” Robert Heffel, the auction house’s vice-president, said after the sale. “To see such exceptional works by our country’s iconic artists resonate so deeply with collectors is incredibly rewarding. It’s an honour for our team to help steward these national treasures into their next chapters.”

The top lot of the night was *Northern Lake* (1926) by the Group of Seven leader Lawren Harris, which realised C\$3.1m (\$2.2m, all prices include buyer’s premiums), just topping its high estimate. The painting came from the

University Club of Toronto's collection and had made quite a splash 99 years earlier, when it earned Harris a gold medal at the 1926 Sesqui-Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The next year it was featured in an exhibition of Canadian art at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris.

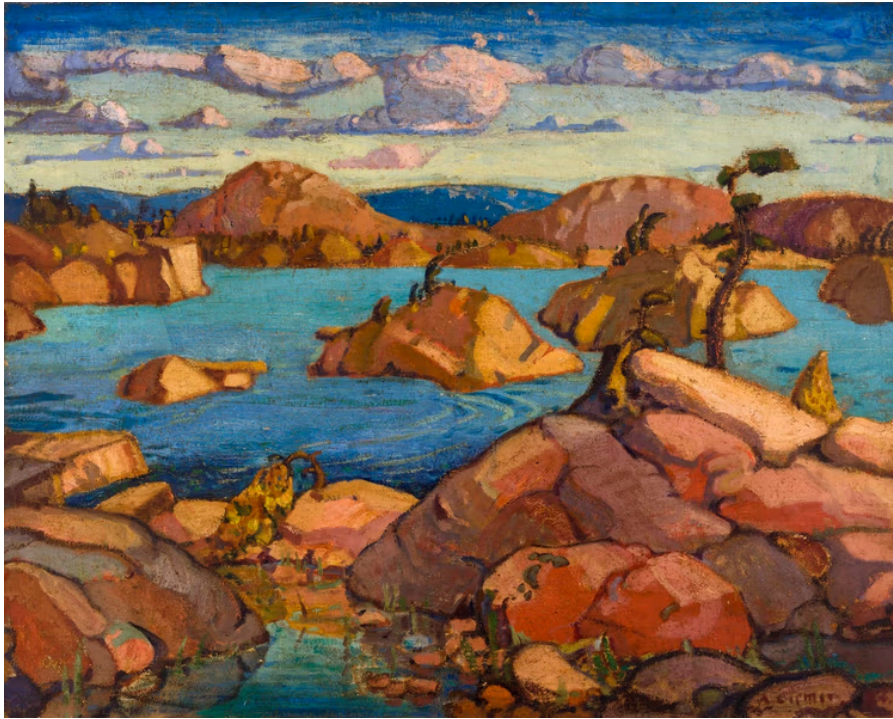


Franklin Carmichael, *Leaf Pattern*, 1922  
Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House

Franklin Carmichael's *Leaf Pattern* (1922), also consigned by the University Club of Toronto, was perhaps the evening's biggest surprise. After competitive bidding the foliage-filled canvas sold for C\$2.2m (\$1.6m), more than three times its low estimate of C\$700,000. "We didn't just break the record" for Carmichael's work, Robert Heffel quipped, "we shattered it."

Another overperformer from the University Club of Toronto collection was *McGregor Bay Islands*, a canvas by the Group of Seven member Arthur Lismer, who immigrated to Canada from England in 1911. It doubled its

high estimate, selling for C\$1.6m (\$1.1m), setting a new auction record for Lismer's work.



Arthur Lismer, *McGregor Bay Islands*, 1925  
Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House

One more Group of Seven member notched a new auction record: A.Y. Jackson, whose *Night on the Skeena River* (1927)—featuring crest poles with the Northern Lights ablaze behind—realised nearly C\$1.1m (\$780,000), just over its high estimate.

Three oil sketches by the ill-fated Tom Thomson, each just over eight-by-ten-inches, surpassed the million-dollar mark, The group was led by *Autumn, Algonquin Park*, which sold for C\$1.2m (\$866,000).





Emily Carr, *Shoreline*, around 1936  
 Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House

Emily Carr, arguably Canada's most famous woman artist, was well represented with seven works on offer in the sale. *Shoreline* (around 1936), an oil composition set on the Pacific coast that was her stomping ground for most of her life, surpassed its high estimate to sell for C\$901,250 (\$650,000). Another landscape, the work-on-paper *British Columbia Forest*, realised C\$541,250 (\$390,000), more than double its low estimate.

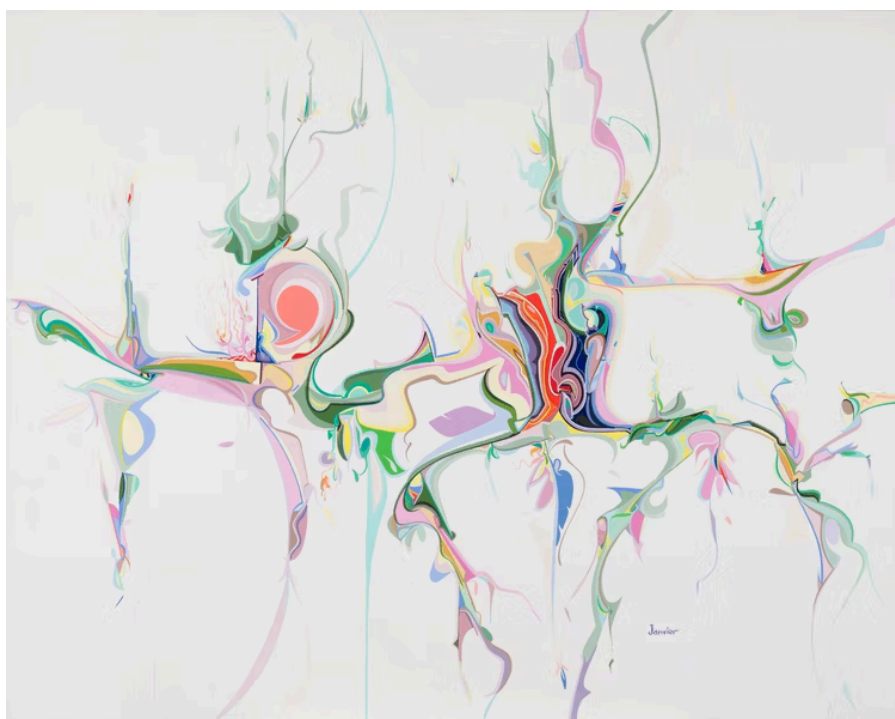
A seasonally appropriate inclusion by the late First Nations artist Daphne Odjig, *Awakening of Spring* (1985), sold for C\$133,250 (\$96,100)—nearly twice its high estimate—setting a new auction record for the the much-honoured painter. Rita Letendre, whose work is currently juxtaposed with that of Norval Morrisseau in a [show at the Art Gallery of Ontario](#) [↗](#) (until July 2026), was represented by *Germition* (1961) and *L'espace d'un moment* (1962). The former went for C\$181,250 (\$130,700), around four times its low estimate; the latter fetched C\$193,250 (\$139,300), overperforming against the same C\$45,000 to C\$65,000 estimate.



Daphne Odjig, *Awakening of Spring*, 1985  
 Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House

And in the Canadian, Impressionist and modern portion of the sale, Helen McNicoll's *Happy Moments* garnered C\$229,250 (\$165,300), more than three times its high estimate.

Works by Christopher Pratt (*Private School*, from 1987) and Paul-Emile Borduas (*Composition*, from 1951) also performed well against expectations. The Pratt went for C\$265,250 (\$191,300), well past its C\$200,000 high estimate. The Borduas landed near its high estimate, selling for a lofty C\$631,250 (\$455,300).



Alex Simeon Janvier, *99 Goes Hollywood*, 1988  
 Courtesy Heffel Fine Art Auction House

As if to drive home the prevailing atmosphere of Canadiana, there was even an abstract composition by Alex Janvier made in reference to the Canadian hockey legend Wayne Gretzky. The artist's 1988 painting *99 Goes to Hollywood* (a reference to Gretzky's jersey number and his trade that year to Los Angeles) more than doubled its high estimate, netting C\$157,250 (\$113,400).

Gretzky spent his first nine seasons in the National Hockey League (NHL) playing in Edmonton, Alberta, a city that is dear to the Heffels. "Both David and I were born in Edmonton, so go Oilers, go," Robert Heffel said, in reference to the Edmonton Oilers, the only remaining Canadian team in the NHL playoffs.