

IMPORTANT WORKS FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION, ONTARIO



145 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

Island, North Shore, Lake Superior

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled and inscribed with the artist's symbol and *Not For Sale*, circa 1922 – 1923
10 ³/₈ × 13 ³/₄ in, 26.4 × 35 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired as a gift from Howard and Margaret Harris to Marjory and Schuyler Snively, circa 1946
By descent through the family to the present Private Collection, Ontario

LITERATURE

Doris Mills, *L.S. Harris Inventory*, 1936, Lake Superior Paintings, a drawing of the large canvas entitled *Lake Superior Country* illustrated by Hans Jensen, listed, location noted as the Studio Building, catalogue #17

IN THE EARLY 1920s, Lawren Harris's landscape art was undergoing an exciting and rapid evolution, having been reinvigorated after the trials of the First World War. The formation of the Group of Seven and their collective creative endeavours in northern Ontario's Algoma region (an area east of Lake Superior) had provided much-needed replenishment and enthusiasm for the development of a distinctly Canadian form of landscape art. After exploring the abundant diversity of subjects amongst Algoma's tangled woods, lakes with beaver dams and cascading waterfalls, Harris began to focus more and more on grander ideas and broader vistas, moving up to high points and depicting the vastness of the forested landscape in front of him. Works such as the solemn and powerful canvas *Algoma Country* (circa 1922, based on a circa 1921 sketch), in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), demonstrate this shift to the expansive, and soon Harris would seek out new sketching grounds to fit his vision. *Island, North Shore, Lake Superior* is representative of the artist during this exciting period, in which he was building upon his previous developments in the geographical region that would most define his vision.

After an initial short visit to Rosspoint in 1921, Harris and A.Y. Jackson took their first major trips to the north shore of Lake Superior in the autumn of 1922 and 1923. On these expeditions they explored and sketched across a large area, from the town of Marathon along west to Port Coldwell, with much focus between the two locations around Port Munro, where *Island, North Shore, Lake Superior* was executed. This work depicts a view south over the lake from a high point of land near the (now abandoned) port, looking out to Peninsula Harbour, with Blondin Island in the middle and the edge of Hawkins Island on the right. This particular vantage point was a favourite of Harris's, and he painted a number of sketches from here, looking out in different directions. From these, he worked up several important early Lake Superior canvases, including one based on this exact sketch, titled *Lake Superior Country, Lake Superior Painting 17* (location currently

unknown, listed as unfinished in the 1936 Doris Mills inventory). *Afternoon Sun, Lake Superior*, a 1924 canvas in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), is another example, capturing the view looking to the west down the shore.

Like the AGO and NGC canvases, this work finds Harris perched atop a rocky outcropping, gazing into the distance across the splendour of this uniquely northern landscape. The artist seems to have enjoyed the company of the dead, burnt-out trees in these areas—he must have been seeking them out. As a visual device, they provide a strong complement to the horizontal dominance of the scene, but it is their role as a subject that is most intriguing. They accompany the artist, and the viewer, reducing the distance between the individual experiencing the moment and all of the other elements of the environment doing the same. These trees are fellow members of the congregation in this church of natural wonder, pushing towards an idea of unification of all things, which Harris was keenly interested in.

Close examination of this work reveals that Harris originally included more than the solitary tree—several other tree forms are visible beneath the paint, spectres of the artistic process of refinement and clarification that embodies Harris's artistic genius. This work, therefore, in addition to being a unified distillation of the scene, contains within it a tangible and physical recording of the artist's process, providing rare insight into the refinement of his vision.

Island, North Shore, Lake Superior comes from a critical time in Harris's evolution, and it represents an iconic subject that inspired his contemporaries in the Group of Seven and beyond. More than anywhere else, the expansive Lake Superior landscape became uniquely associated with Harris, and the effect of his interpretations of it is visible in the artistic work of Arthur Lismer, Frank Carmichael and A.J. Casson as well as Anne Savage, Yvonne McKague Housser and even Emily Carr. Works such as this oil sketch capture Harris's quest for underlying truth in the landscape, and his ever-evolving approach as he ascended to new heights of his artistic vision.

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

This painting and lot 146, *Lake Superior Sketch xcv*, both come from the family of Harris, and were gifts from Howard and Margaret Harris to Marjory and Schuyler Snively. Marjory's first husband was Captain Trumbull Warren, who was tragically killed in action at Ypres in 1915. Trumbull's mother, Mrs. H.D. Warren, was a founding member of the Art Gallery of Toronto, and his sister, Helen, was married to Charles Band, the noted collector and promoter of Canadian art and childhood friend of Harris. It was through this family connection that Marjory and Schuyler Snively became close friends with the Harris family and received these paintings as cherished gifts. They have been passed down through the family since the 1940s, and this is the first time they have been seen in public for nearly 100 years.

ESTIMATE: \$200,000 – 300,000