



118 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

Northern Lake

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled on the exhibition labels, inscribed *Sesquicentennial Exposition, 13* (circled) / *1 x 9* / *Gold Med* and with the University Club of Toronto inventory #SUCT-0000-H012 on a label and stamped *Exposition d'art canadien, Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1927, 1926* 36 ½ x 45 ½ in, 92.7 x 115.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Mrs. Walter Massey, Toronto, 1926  
R.S. Waldie, Toronto  
A gift from the above to the University Club of Toronto, 1959

LITERATURE

*Exhibitions of the Group of Seven and Art in French Canada*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1926, listed page 3  
*Paintings, Sculpture & Prints in the Department of Fine Arts*, Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition, Philadelphia, 1926, reproduced page 42 and listed page 85  
Dorothy Grafly, “The Palace of the Arts: Sesquicentennial in Retrospect,” *American Magazine of Art*, vol. 17, no. 12, December 1926, pages 630 – 638  
“Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Art Has Resulted in Fine Picture Collection,” *Ottawa Citizen*, January 12, 1927  
“Canadian Exhibit in Ottawa,” *Christian Science Monitor*, circa February 1927  
Alice Mackay, “The Second Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art,” *Canadian Homes & Gardens*, April 1927, reproduced page 32  
*Exposition d'art canadien*, Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1927, titled as *Lac du Nord*, listed page 21  
Jeremy Adamson, *Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes, 1906 – 1930*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1978, reproduced page 150 and listed page 229  
Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, National Gallery of Canada, 1995, photos of the 1927 exhibition at Musée du Jeu de Paume reproduced page 216  
Steve Martin et al., *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015, reproduced page 128

EXHIBITED

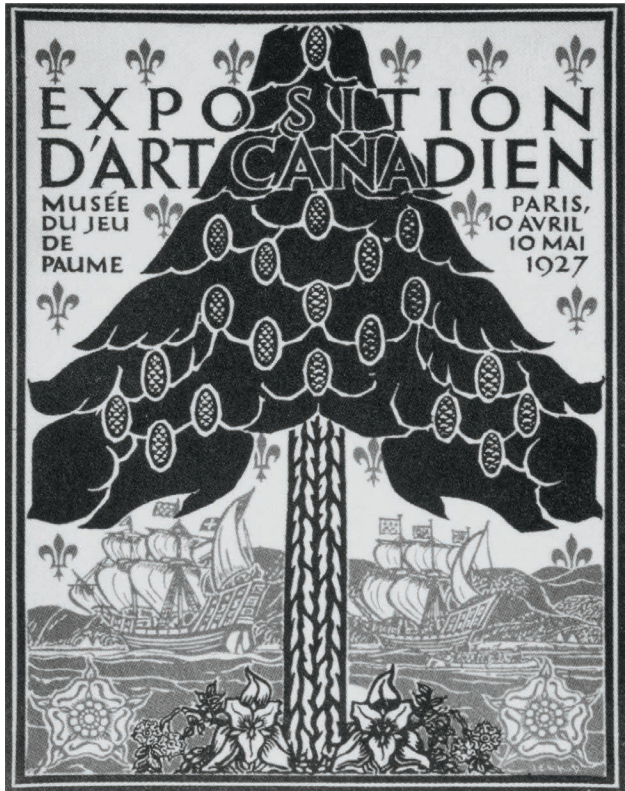
Art Gallery of Toronto, May 7 – 31, 1926, *Exhibitions of the Group of Seven and Art in French Canada*, catalogue #21  
Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition, Philadelphia, *Paintings, Sculpture & Prints in the Department of Fine Arts*, June 1 – December 1, 1926, Gold Medal winner, catalogue #1564  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art*, January 1927  
Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, *Exposition d'art canadien*, April 10 – May 10, 1927, titled as *Lac du Nord*, catalogue #61  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Lawren S. Harris: Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes, 1906 – 1930*, January 14 – February 26, 1978, catalogue #141  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, October 11, 2015 – January 24, 2016, traveling in 2016 to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, catalogue #33



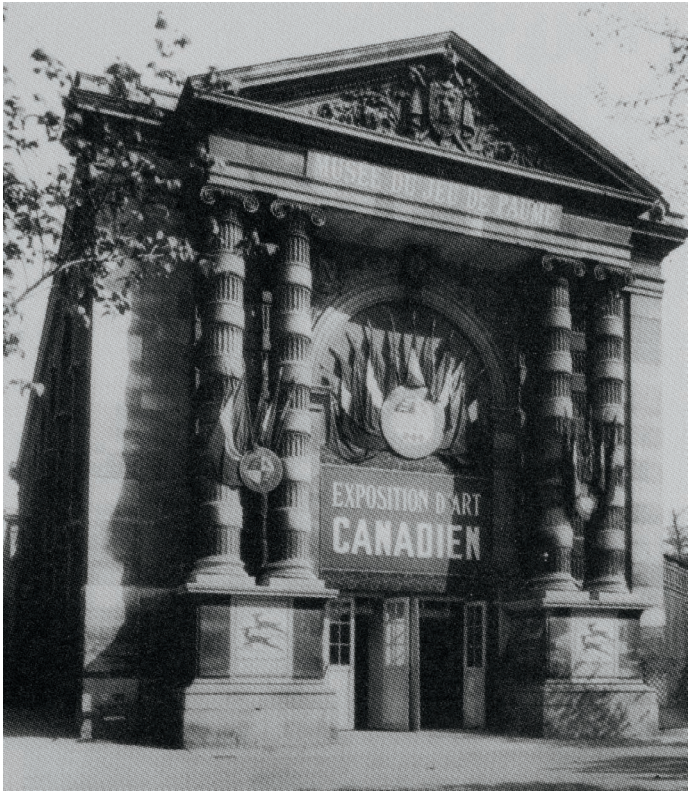
The Gold Medal (bronze with gold plate) awarded to Lawren Harris for *Northern Lake* at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia, 1926  
Courtesy of the family of Lawren S. Harris

Not for sale with this lot





Cover of the *Exposition d'art canadien* catalogue, Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, designed by J.E.H. MacDonald, 1927



Facade of the Musée du Jeu de Paume with the poster published for the 1927 exhibition, designed by Thoreau MacDonald



Installation view of the *Exposition d'art canadien* at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, April 1927, with *Northern Lake* indicated

*NORTHERN LAKE* IS a solemn and refined work, a representation of the quiet power that Lawren Harris recognized in the Canadian landscape, and which he determinedly worked to convey to audiences through his disciplined and inspired paintings. Created in 1926, while Harris was at the pinnacle of his landscape era, it stands as a testament to his clarity of vision and skill in execution. Further, *Northern Lake*, with an exemplary record of early exhibitions rivaled by few other works of the artist, carries an important legacy regarding the advancement of Harris's vision for Canadian art on the international stage.

By the mid-1920s, Harris's landscape art was undergoing exciting and rapid changes. Following the disruption and traumas of the First World War, enthusiasm for developing a distinctly Canadian form of landscape art had been revived with the formation of the Group of Seven and their exploration of the wild and impressive subjects of northern Ontario's Algoma region (located to the east of Lake Superior). After he had made repeated visits to capture the vitality and splendour of the autumn season there, Harris's interest began to shift and focus less on the outwardly decorative aspects of nature and more on its underlying essential forms. On the north shore of Lake Superior, he found a subject

that aligned with this new focus, and the region provided him with the abundance of material he needed to realize his artistic aspirations.

The subject of this canvas is a small lake on the Coldwell Peninsula, now a part of Neys Provincial Park, just inland from Lake Superior's north shore. Harris had first traveled north from Algoma in 1921, going as far as Rosspoint. His fascination with the area's grandeur and artistic potential resulted in him making regular repeat visits throughout the 1920s, including a particular focus on the Coldwell area, found to the west of Marathon, Ontario. Harris and A.Y. Jackson visited this area first in 1922 and returned in the fall of 1925, joined for the first time by Franklin Carmichael.

Between these visits, Harris's style and approach to sketching had evolved, and he had shifted from using sketching panels of approximately 10 ½ x 13 ¾ inches to boards 12 x 15 inches. The larger format gave him more room to capture the sense of space he found resonating in the region—and more impact to the distillation and intensification of forms that he was pursuing. Jackson later recounted the connection Harris found to the place, writing: "It was this country that gave Harris the motives for many of

his best-known canvases. There was a feeling of space, dramatic lighting, the stark forms of rocky hills and dead trees, and beyond, Lake Superior, shining like burnished silver. However bold the artist's conception of it was, it seemed inadequate."<sup>1</sup>

The 1925 trip yielded many sketches that Harris was able to take back to this studio in Toronto, where he would work a select few into full-size canvases. The source for this canvas is a sketch (also entitled *Northern Lake*) that was owned by friend and fellow artist Doris Mills Speirs and donated to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Harris did multiple sketches of the same small lake, which, according to recollections by A.J. Casson (who would join a 1928 trip to the area), was located a short distance from the spot where the group camped. As a result, the same subject is found in works by Casson as well as in one of Carmichael's most celebrated large watercolours, *Lone Lake* (private collection).

For Harris, there is a fascinating balance that this composition offers when compared to his other major Lake Superior works. In contrast to those depicting the wide-open expanse of the inland sea, this one instead ensconces a confined pool, a small lake separated from the rest of the world. Both the darkening sky and the foreground rock work together to further accentuate this sense of

enclosure. The effect is enveloping, bringing the audience into a poetic and serene moment amongst the bluster of the wider wilds.

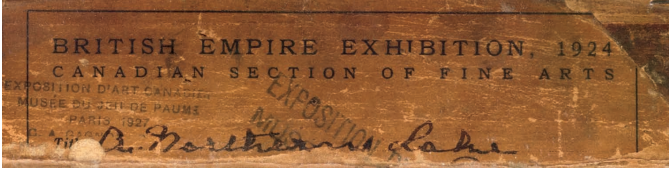
Further, when compared to the centre-weighted *North Shore, Lake Superior* (collection of the National Gallery of Canada), with its burnt-out pine stump, and *Pic Island* (in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection), where the bulbous island occupies the focal point, in this work there is space in the centre, a gap between the hills where there is nothing but distant light. This unique absence creates an atmospheric and captivating sense of mystery, holding the audience's attention and drawing them further into the composition.

Painting the canvas soon after returning from Lake Superior, Harris obviously felt confident with the work, and it was one of five Lake Superior paintings that he included in the Group of Seven's fifth show, held at the Art Gallery of Toronto in May of 1926. As with their other exhibitions, the reception in Toronto was mixed, and generated much discussion. Harris and the Group anticipated this and addressed it in the text of the catalogue, which reads: "The work this year as in the past, has been inspired solely by Canadian materials. ... The Group of Seven realize that subject is not necessarily an ingredient of a work of art.





Title page of the official souvenir view book of the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia, 1926



labels on verso



**LAWREN HARRIS**  
**Northern Lake**  
oil on board, circa 1925  
12 x 14 ¾ in, 30.4 x 37.6 cm  
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1969.17.1  
Gift of Dr. J. Murray Speirs

Not for sale with this lot

Nevertheless it also feels that Canadian environment is the most potent stimulus to Canadian creative genius. Even though an artist may not necessarily look for the support of approval from his people, it is from them that he must draw his inspiration.”<sup>2</sup>

Critically, the works in this show were responded to very positively by William Hekking, the director of the Albright Gallery in Buffalo (where, just over a decade previous, Harris had reveled in a show of Scandinavian art). Hekking suggested that a Canadian contribution be included in the upcoming Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia. *Northern Lake*, as well as many other works from this Group of Seven exhibition, were selected to be sent to the United States.

This bold work was photographed and illustrated in the exhibition’s catalogue, among extremely impressive company; other Canadian works that accompanied it include Tom Thomson’s *West Wind* (collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario), J.E.H. MacDonald’s *Solemn Land* (collection of the National Gallery of Canada) and *Mist Fantasy* (collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario), Arthur Lismer’s *September Gale* (collection of the National Gallery of Canada), and Frank Carmichael’s *Snow Clouds* (Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto) and *A Northern Village* (collection of the Orillia Public Library). Other works by Harris included in the exhibition were *A Grey Day in Town* (collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton), *Ontario Hill Town* (collection of University College, University of Toronto) and two portraits (including the *Portrait of Dr. Salem Bland*, now in the Art Gallery of Ontario).

The works gained an impressive profile in this international show, receiving much praise and attention, as demonstrated in a contemporary review:

It was evident that the artists of the north have achieved, through simplification and through expression of masses by means of colour, a stronger, more vivid impression of natural grandeur than have our own wielders of the brush. The work of Rockwell Kent, with its cold, dramatic simplicity, aims at the same goal, but there is about it a hard crudity not to be found in the greater colour depths, the greater intensification of forms in the landscapes by the Canadian Artist Lawren Harris.<sup>3</sup>

*Northern Lake* would in fact be the most celebrated of the Canadian works in the show and was awarded a Gold Medal. (Carmichael was also awarded a medal, a silver for his work *A Northern Village*.)

The Sesqui-Centennial also featured a stellar list of international artists, among them George Bellows and Childe Hassam (USA); Edgar Degas, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley and Pierre Auguste Renoir (France); and Alexander Archipenko, Marc Chagall, Vasili Kandinsky and Casimir Malyevich (Russia).

After being on view in Philadelphia, *Northern Lake* was shown in January 1927 at the *Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art* at the

National Gallery, where it was again reviewed favourably. Wrote the *Ottawa Citizen*:

It seems that Lawren Harris is the cleverest of the lot... “Northern Lake”...is another remarkable picture, a mass of purple mountains and sombre trees and a luminous sky reflected in the waters of a serpentine lake. This picture received a gold medal at the Sesqui-Centennial at Philadelphia last year, an award which many may find puzzling but which nevertheless shows the keenness of appreciation among United States art judges.<sup>4</sup>

Again, shortly after this, the canvas was sent to Paris to be exhibited again in the *Exposition d’art canadien* at the Musée du Jeu de Palme, where it had the honour of joining works that had previously been on international display at the British Empire show in the United Kingdom.

Finally, the painting would return home to the collection of Mrs. Walter Massey, who had purchased it prior to the trip to Philadelphia. The historical connections between the Massey and Harris families (whose farm implement companies merged in the late nineteenth century to much financial success), and the lifelong friendship of Harris with diplomat and former governor general Vincent Massey (nephew of this painting’s first owner), give this work an even more impressive pedigree, further enhanced by the long custodianship this work has had at the

University Club, a Toronto institution that has proudly displayed the work amongst its other stellar examples of fine Canadian Art. We thank Alec Blair, Director/Lead Researcher, Lawren S. Harris Inventory Project, for contributing the above essay.

1. A.Y. Jackson, “Lawren Harris: A Biographical Sketch,” in *Lawren Harris: Painting, 1910–1948*, ed. Sydney Key (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1948), exhibition catalogue, 11.
2. *Exhibitions of the Group of Seven and Art in French Canada*, (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1926), 2.
3. Dorothy Gaffly, “The Palace of the Arts: Sesquicentennial in Retrospect,” *American Magazine of Art* 17, no. 12 (December 1926): 634.
4. “Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Art Has Resulted in Fine Picture Collection,” *Ottawa Citizen*, January 12, 1927, 4.

We thank Charles H. Hill, former curator of Canadian Art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada and author of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, for his assistance with researching this lot.

The work is in a handcrafted period frame by Alfred J. Boughton, a Toronto picture framer who made frames for Harris and other members of the Group of Seven.

**ESTIMATE: \$2,000,000 – 3,000,000**