



119 Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA RSA 1882 – 1974

Abandoned Mine, Great Bear Lake

oil on canvas, signed
21 ¼ x 26 in, 54 x 66 cm

PROVENANCE

A Gift from the Artist

By descent to a Private Collection

Canadian Art, Joyner / Waddington's, May 26, 2009, titled as
*The Abandoned Consolidated Mining and Smelt Corp. at Cross
Fault Lake Near Port Radium, Great Bear Lake*, lot 34

Private Collection, Vancouver

An Important Canadian Collection

A.Y. JACKSON FIRST traveled to Great Bear Lake, Northwest Territories, in 1938 at the invitation of Gilbert LaBine, the mine owner who had discovered radium and uranium deposits at Port Radium. The journey marked the start of an important chapter in Jackson's career. He spent six weeks exploring and painting in the region, establishing a deep and lasting connection to this remote landscape that would draw him back repeatedly—in 1949, 1950, 1951 and 1959.¹ As he later reflected, "I guess I am a compass, always heading north. I really do belong to the caribou country, not to the cow country."²

The initial journey north made a profound impression. Flying over an immense and unfamiliar terrain, Jackson encountered a landscape of striking geological clarity—rocky hills, scattered stands of spruce and birch, and an intricate network of lakes formed during the retreat of the polar ice cap. He described his arrival at Port Radium as reaching "a little centre of industry in a great empty wilderness," a phrase that conveys both the isolation of the region and the incongruous presence of human enterprise within it. Writing of his time there, he noted, "I spent six weeks at Eldorado, from August into October. The weather was lovely. I wandered over the rocky hills, which were easy to traverse." The experience fulfilled a long-held desire to explore more of the North. As Jackson recalled, "Ten years earlier I had been as far as Yellowknife and I always had a yearning to see what kind of country lay beyond."

Unlike many of Jackson's Great Bear Lake compositions, which emphasize wilderness terrain, *Abandoned Mine, Great Bear Lake* introduces a distinct human presence. The cluster of buildings along the shoreline, set against rolling hills and luminous water, alludes to the mining activity that briefly animated this remote region. The Eldorado Mine at Port Radium was among the most significant northern industrial enterprises of its time, first developed for radium extraction and later for uranium, a material that would assume global importance in the mid-twentieth century. In the late 1930s, the settlement drew prospectors, engineers and geologists northward. Jackson, who moved easily

among these communities, was attentive to their presence within the landscape. Here, however, the structures appear quiet and uninhabited, softened by light and integrated into the broader landforms.

The composition unfolds through gently undulating forms that guide the eye across the canvas—from the foreground buildings and shoreline, across the bright expanse of water, and towards the rising hills beyond. Jackson's handling of the landscape is both descriptive and expressive. Broad passages of colour—deep purples, russets and warm ochres—define the hills, while bands of yellow and green vegetation enliven the surface. The sky, articulated in flowing horizontal streaks, echoes the movement of the land below, creating a unified and harmonious composition.

Jackson was, above all, a painter deeply attuned to the rhythm of the land. His approach was grounded in direct experience, often traveling on foot and observing closely the textures and subtle variations of the terrain. As Wayne Larsen has noted, works from the Great Bear Lake expeditions demonstrate a profound sensitivity to the physical character of the northern landscape, where colour and form are distilled into compositions of clarity and vitality.³ The contrast between the cool blues of the lake and the warm tones of the land intensifies the visual impact.

In his travels across Canada, Jackson sought to capture the essential character of the land. The region around Great Bear Lake, with its exposed geology and sparse vegetation, offered precisely the kind of subject that aligned with his artistic vision. Dennis Reid wrote that Jackson's works from the Barren Lands are among the finest of his career, revealing a landscape where "nothing extraneous survives. Fundamental values seem clear."⁴

In *Abandoned Mine, Great Bear Lake*, Jackson presents both the enduring presence of the northern landscape and the fleeting imprint of human industrial endeavor. The modest buildings, dwarfed by the expansive hills and sky, underscore the impermanence of industrial settlements in northern regions, while affirming Jackson's deep and abiding connection to the North—a landscape that remained throughout his life a source of inspiration, challenge and renewal.

1. Naomi Jackson Groves, *A.Y.'s Canada* (Clarke, Irwin, 1968), 208, 214.

2. A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Clarke, Irwin, 1958), 122–23, including next three quotes.

3. Wayne Larsen, *A.Y. Jackson: The Life of a Landscape Painter* (Dundurn Press, 2009), 176.

4. Dennis Reid, *Alberta Rhythm: The Later Work of A.Y. Jackson* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982), exhibition catalogue, 28.

ESTIMATE: \$100,000 – 150,000