



Intriguing. Inviting. Inspiring.

## Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven

In the early decades of the twentieth century, circumstances brought together several artists who explored and fell in love with the varied landscapes of Canada. Collectively, they agreed that the country's magnificent wilderness regions needed to be recorded in a painting style that captured the untouched beauty of the landscapes that inspired them. Today, these artists have become the most famous amongst Canadian artists and, indeed, have become national icons.

In their early careers many of the artists who would later form the Group of Seven were employed at commercial design firms. It was while working at Toronto-based design firm Grip Ltd. that Tom Thomson, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston and Franklin Carmichael first met and discovered their common artistic interests. The artists began taking weekend sketching trips together and would often gather at Toronto's Arts and Letters Club to socialize and discuss new directions for Canadian art.

Their focus on the Canadian landscape as the subject for their art reflected an increasingly nationalistic sentiment within a deep-rooted love for the natural environment of Canada. The Group's intention was to produce work in a style that broke with European traditions in art. Their bright and bold use of paint and colour seemed a suitable complement to the aggressive expansion that the country was experiencing at the outset of the 1920s. Before the end of the decade, this new and distinctive painting style was supported by the National Gallery of Canada and gained an enthusiastic audience amongst the general public as well.

Tom Thomson's untimely death in 1917 was a great loss for the art world and more especially for his fellow artists whom he had introduced to the landscapes of northern Ontario. Although he did not live to become a Group member, Thomson's paintings of scenes from Algonquin Park served as inspiration for the other artists. In 1919 the artists decided to organize an exhibition and to call themselves the *Group of Seven*. The seven founding members were: Lawren S. Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston, Franklin Carmichael and A.Y. Jackson.

Their first exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto in May 1920 marked an important moment in the history of Canadian art, as the artists' interpretation of the Canadian landscape reflected a belief that Canada itself must inspire Canadian art.

Frank Johnston only exhibited in one of the 1920 exhibitions and, following his resignation from the Group, A.J. Casson was invited to join in 1926. In an effort to widen the geographical base away from Toronto, Edwin Holgate of Montreal was asked to join in 1930. Although L.L. FitzGerald of Winnipeg joined the Group in 1932, the final Group of Seven exhibition was held in 1931.

The Group of Seven's determination and their belief in Canadian culture were immensely influential in the years following the 1920 exhibition, and that influence prevails to this day. For many, they symbolize the concept of a distinctly Canadian identity.



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## Members of the Group of Seven

### Original Seven Members

J.E.H. MacDonald	(1873-1932)
Arthur Lismer	(1895-1969) *
Frank Johnston	(1888-1949) *
Frederick Varley	(1881-1969) *
Franklin Carmichael	(1890-1945)
Lawren Harris	(1885-1970) *
A.Y. Jackson	(1882-1974) *

### Later Members

A.J. Casson	(1898-1992) *
Edwin Holgate	(1892-1977)
Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald	(1890-1956)

\* Six members of the Group of Seven are buried in the historic cemetery on the McMichael Canadian Art Collection grounds, together with Founders Robert A. McMichael and his wife, Signe McMichael.