

McMichael Canadian Art Collection Announces

Tom Thomson: North Star

The First Thomson Retrospective in more than 20 Years



Tom Thomson (1877–1917), *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17, oil on canvas, 127.9 × 139.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 1918, 1519, Photo: NGC

June 22, 2023, Kleinburg, ON – Tom Thomson (1877–1917) was Canada’s preeminent modern painter, an artist whose unprecedented brilliance blazed the trail for the formation of the Group of Seven in the wake of his tragic death in 1917 at Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. Indisputably, his catalytic achievement changed the face of Canadian painting forever. Opening on June 24, 2023, ***Tom Thomson: North Star*** will offer a close look at his legacy, focussing on the small oil paintings, also known as ‘oil sketches’, of which he is the supreme master. “With Thomson, because the career is so brief—really less than four years—it is less of an arc and

more of an explosion,” says exhibition curator Ian A.C. Dejardin, Executive Director of the McMichael. “What will be key is to learn more about the sparks that set it off.”

The subject of many catalogues, books, plays, musical compositions, films and exhibitions, Thomson has a canonical place in Canadian culture, and each generation must reckon with his legacy anew, bringing to bear the fresh perspectives of their time. *North Star* is first major Thomson retrospective in more than 20 years and will bring together more than 130 oil sketches from the McMichael’s permanent collection, the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and other national museums and private collections.

Organised both by chronology and by theme, Dejardin and McMichael Chief Curator Sarah Milroy (CM) will pare away the inessential to get at the essence of Thomson’s vision and isolate particular moments of artistic experimentation. A handful of larger scale studio works will also be included, demonstrating the transition from sketch to canvas.

The exhibition will further consider Thomson within the framework of the international art of its time. “I tend to see the influence of Post-Impressionism as a liberation, rather than a prescribed stylistic approach,” says Dejardin. “The way that the ripples of Post-Impressionism spread out across the world, charging the creativity of artists like Tom Thomson and Emily Carr, is fascinating.”

Finally, the exhibition and accompanying publication will consider Thomson’s distinctive public persona as the quintessential woodsman at home in the rugged northland—a persona crafted by both his contemporaries and posthumously. “A national obsession with the mystery of Tom Thomson’s death by drowning in Canoe Lake, and a myth-making propensity to focus on his ‘lonely woodsman’ persona have often distracted attention from where his genius truly lies – in the hundreds of dazzling small oil sketches that he produced in his short career,” said Dejardin. “This show looks for Thomson, not in the mythology and conspiracy theories, but in these small masterpieces.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated colour catalogue, including essays by Dejardin, Milroy, and Algonquin historian Christine McRae Luckasavitch. Additionally, the publication includes appreciations by contemporary artists Ben Reeves, Sandra Meigs, and Zachari Logan, all of whom are engaged with Thomson’s artistic legacy.

North Star furthers the trajectory of the McMichael’s summer slate of exhibitions that explore artistic responses to the climate crisis and humankind’s relationship to the landscape.

“Tom Thomson captured the raw, natural beauty of Ontario in his paintings with a style that was uniquely his own,” said Neil Lumsden, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. “His art invokes a sense of wonder while connecting us to Canada’s history and identity. Our

government is proud to support the McMichael and I encourage everyone to visit and experience this iconic collection first-hand.”

Tom Thomson: North Star is organized by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection with the exceptional support of the National Gallery of Canada. The exhibition is on view at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection from June 24, 2023, through January 14, 2024 and will travel to the Art Gallery of Alberta in February 2024.

To obtain high-resolution images, request transportation to the McMichael, or to request an interview with the curators, please contact Sam Cheung, Media Relations and Communications Associate at scheung@mcmichael.com or 905.893.1121 ext. 2210.

Ces informations sont aussi disponibles en français.

ABOUT THE McMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is an agency of the Government of Ontario and acknowledges the support of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, and the McMichael Canadian Art Foundation. It is the only major museum in the country devoted exclusively to Canadian art. In addition to touring exhibitions, the McMichael houses a permanent collection of more than 7,000 works by historic and contemporary Canadian artists, including Tom Thomson, the Group of Seven and their contemporaries, Indigenous artists and artists from the many diasporic communities. The Gallery is located on 100 acres of forested landscape and hiking trails at 10365 Islington Avenue, Kleinburg, north of Major Mackenzie Drive in the City of Vaughan. For more information, please visit mcmichael.com.

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