

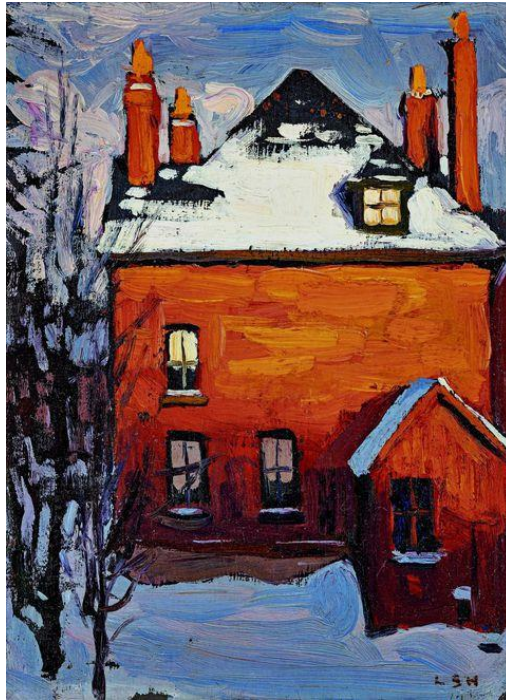
## Lawren Harris' painting 'Little House' casts a golden light on the city of Toronto

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Sometimes the things that seem most familiar deserve a new eye. A house in the city, for example. A winter's day.

When we think of Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris, the first images that spring to mind are his stark landscapes. However, as Sarah Milroy, chief curator of the McMichael Canadian Collection notes, after he returned to Canada from studying in Germany in 1908, he painted Toronto houses, particularly homes in The Ward, a neighbourhood that housed working-class immigrants. (Parts of The Ward were demolished from the early 1900s through to the 1960s to make way for municipal buildings including City Hall and the hospital district.)

“He was interested in the gritty texture of urban life,” says Milroy, adding that it wasn’t until many years later that he painted the landscapes that would make his work some of the most recognizable in the country, helping to define how Canadians see ourselves.

Interestingly, those landscapes would cause the Group of Seven to be accused of creating the myth of an unpopulated land by leaving out the Indigenous peoples who lived here before settlers came, by leaving

out the immigrants who were the engine of the country's astonishing growth at that time — some of which Harris captured in his Toronto paintings and drawings.

“Little House,” above, notes Milroy, “captures that golden light that is specific to this city at the end of a winter’s day, a moment of rare beauty amid the bleakness as the light slants in from the west.”

Toronto can be a grey city — but that light softens the lines of this little house, adding a glow as the cold shadow of the winter’s night creeps up from below. Painted more than a hundred years ago, it evokes the same sunsets so many of us are uplifted by, now, as we live through a second lockdown and a long, deep winter.

This Harris painting is part of the “*A Like Vision: The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson*” exhibit at the McMichael Canadian Collection. You can visit online and it will also be available to see in person once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.