

Queen's and drank himself to death. This guy had an aneurysm."

Eugene had biographies for the specimens. He knew them all but was against giving his body to Science. He wanted a cemetery burial.

On the wall of the students' lounge were black and white photographs of former students. They huddled in their lab coats and smiled over half-naked cadavers lying under sheets. You never saw such big smiles. In their outstretched hands were scalpels, mallets, retractors and body parts. The oldest photos dated from before World War I.

Everyone looked terribly happy, except the cadavers.

After World War II, Eugene began to appear in the pictures.

"You do a wonderful job," we said.

"I keep them looking good," Eugene said. "Moist."

"It's a lost art. Like the old Egyptians."

Near the end of that year we sat with

Eugene on the front stoop of the anatomy building. The air was warm, and our dissection was over. We said farewell to Max and shook Ezekiel's hand for good luck. Outside the anatomy museum the maples had thick leaves, the campus was fragrant with blossoms, and it was hard to concentrate on exams. Eugene told us how he had put the specimens into bottles years ago.

"It takes ages to make a museum," he said.

Anatomy was on the east campus and Arts on the west. In May, we saw Arts students sleeping on the grass, playing baseball and tennis, or kissing on the lower campus. After a while we took our books and went back to the anatomy museum.

It was a fine place to study. It had the wonderful stillness of death.

**Ronald Ruskin**  
Psychiatrist  
Toronto, Ont.

## Haircut

Throughout my adult life,  
my barber,  
a quiet gentleman,  
has trimmed my hair  
in a cyclic rhythm  
much like the tide  
or the phases of the moon.

I took him for granted.

He told me yesterday  
that he was old and sick —  
had cut my hair  
for the last time.

We both had tears  
in our eyes.

**Robert C. Dickson**  
Family Physician  
Hamilton, Ont.

## Lifeworks

# Western spirits

*The Group of Seven in Western Canada*, a travelling exhibition organized by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, challenges a widely held and erroneous view that Canada's most celebrated painters focused their work almost exclusively on central Canada. The sheer scope, quality and range of this ambitious, first-class exhibition testify to their extensive involvement west of Ontario.

Glenbow curator Catharine Mastin has amassed the largest collection ever of paintings done by the Group about the West and in the West. The result is an impressive and compellingly fresh look at the Group of Seven.\* The show is effectively organized both regionally

and thematically. The large opening section is devoted to the Rockies, featuring mainly landscapes by Lawren Harris, J.E.H. Macdonald and Arthur Lismer. The West Coast is represented by Frederick Varley, and the Prairies by Lionel Lemoine FitzGerald and A.Y. Jackson (including his most famous painting of rolling foothills, *Alberta Rhythm*, 1947). The exhibition concludes with a major section devoted to the abstractions of Harris and FitzGerald.†

It is fascinating to compare the approaches of the different artists in the the Group of Seven, whose identities and personal styles tend to be fused



Thomas Moore Photography, Toronto

**Arthur Lismer, 1928.** *Cathedral Mountain*, oil on canvas, 122.0 cm × 142.5 cm. Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; gift of Sidney Dawes, 1959.

\*The Group of Seven was an artist's collective formed in 1920 and dissolved in 1932. The original seven members were Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. Macdonald, Franklin Carmichael and Franz Johnston (who showed only with the group's first exhibition). A.J. Casson joined in 1926, Edwin Holgate in 1931 and Lionel Lemoine FitzGerald in 1932. Tom Thomson died before the group was formed.

†Casson and Carmichael never went to the West. One small segment of the exhibition presents the depictions of Northwest First Nations by A.Y. Jackson and Edwin Holgate, who worked closely with ethnographer Marius Barbeau in the Skeena River project in 1926.

into a cultural monolith. A case in point is the different strategies employed by Harris, Macdonald and Lismer in their depictions of the Rocky Mountains.

Harris's hallmark mountain landscapes, such as *Isolation Peak* (c. 1931) and *Mount Lefroy* (1930) are austere, cool, remote and silent, while MacDonald's are painterly, warm, richly coloured and full of life. In effect, Harris's smooth paintings are translations of actual mountains into idealized icons, existing outside of real time or space, unaffected by weather or any other transient variable of the natural world. Macdonald, on the other hand, revelled in the beauty and variety of nature. He expressed his very personal devotion to a specific place, Lake O'Hara, in carefully observed views seen from near and far, in rain, snow and sun. Yet both men were seeking and expressing the spiritual in nature — the arcane symbolism of Theosophy for Harris and the animating undercurrents of Transcendentalism for Macdonald.

Lismer interpreted the mountains in weighty, sculptural terms. He constructed heavily outlined, massive structures on canvas that seem strangely anthropomorphic and somewhat menacing. An example is his best-known mountain painting, *Cathedral Mountain* (1928), whose insistent materiality makes a telling contrast to the pared-down, otherworldliness of Harris's *Mountain Forms* (1928).

Frederick Varley never shared the overtly nationalistic aspirations of his col-

leagues; his interests and passions lay elsewhere. In 1926 a teaching job took him to BC. Among his best paintings are evocative portraits of his lover and student Vera Weatherbee. In a small, intimate portrait, Vera's sensuality is enhanced by the exaggerated asymmetry of her eyes and her emanating spirituality is suggested by the lush application of an unusual colour complement of green and purple. Vera was also the model for Varley's haunting and elusive *Dhârâna* (c. 1932), which invokes spiritual practises of both Hinduism and Buddhism in its reference to a meditative phase of yoga. Vera sits on the steps of the porch of their house at Lynn Valley, surrounded and enveloped by the landscape. Her head thrust upward, her body erect and immobile, Vera's complete absorption by the cosmos is revealed through the brilliant use of colour, which submerges her in a sea of rich blue impasto. Varley's other famous BC landscapes are all here, too, comparable in their use of modernist devices — high-keyed, arbitrary colours, agitated brushwork and visionary distortions — to the work of Vincent Van Gogh and Edward Munch. In the psychological intensity of his art, Varley projects the image of the archetypal, alienated Modern artist.

The art of Lionel Lemoine FitzGerald, who lived and taught art in Winnipeg, reveals a lucid and focused mind. His small-scale, calm, reflective and intensely personal work seems the very antithesis of the quintessential Group of Seven nationalistic mantra. Yet, he was invited to join the Group in 1932, an indication that the more bombastic phase of "art as nationalism" was over by that time. The modest subject of *The Little Plant* (1947) is a close-up view of an ordinary potted plant set in front of an upstairs window that gives onto a wintry suburban backyard. The awkward, upward striving of this scrawny, indoor plant seems an under-



**Lawren S. Harris, 1928.** *Mountain Forms*, oil on canvas, 152.4 cm × 177.8 cm. Collection of Imperial Oil Limited.



Carlo Calenazzi, Art Gallery of Toronto

**F. H. Varley, c. 1932.** *Dhârâna*, oil on canvas, 86.4 cm × 101.6 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario; gift from the Albert H. Robson Memorial Subscription Fund, 1942.

stated and ironic response to the classic Group of Seven icon: the soaring lone tree, seen against a majestic panorama of water and distant shore, heroically buffeting the northern gales of the Ontario wilderness. FitzGerald turned to the prosaic rather than the sublime, choosing his subjects among the ordinary, unremarkable scenes of city life, as in the backyard view of *Doc Snyder's House* (1931), his most famous painting. But it is FitzGerald's exquisite abstracts of the 1950s that are the jewels of this exhibition. Subtly modulated in the most refined gradations of luminous soft colours, these tonal works present shifting spatial planes in lyrical evocations of the prairies.

Remarkably, almost all of the most famous works by Varley and FitzGerald are in this show, as well as the best known of Harris's pristine mountain landscapes. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the exhibition on the Group of Seven's Western connections is the inclusion of so many canonical masterpieces of Canadian art.

#### **Monique Westra**

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*The Group of Seven in Western Canada* will be on view at: the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Halifax) until Feb. 2; the Winnipeg Art Gallery Feb. 22–May 18; the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria June 1–Sept. 14; and the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) Oct. 10–Jan. 2, 2004.