

For Immediate Release

*I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer:
Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia*



Media is invited to attend a tour of the exhibition with Colin Browne, curator of the exhibition, on Tuesday, July 5, 2:00pm at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Please RSVP to dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca

June 23, 2016, Vancouver, BC – Vancouver Art Gallery’s new exhibition reveals a previously little-known encounter between iconic Canadian painter Emily Carr (1871–1945) and Austrian-born Surrealist Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959) On view from July 1 to November 13, 2016, *I Had an Interesting French Artist to See Me This Summer: Emily Carr and Wolfgang Paalen in British Columbia* showcases nearly 60 exceptional works created by both artists before and after their historic meeting in 1939, in Victoria, BC.

Once regarded as an isolated figure, Emily Carr’s vital connectedness to the artistic milieus of North America and Europe in the early to mid-twentieth century has surfaced in recent research. With Wolfgang Paalen and Emily Carr, a story emerges of two Modernist artists struggling to make sense of the world and to create a physical manifestation of their transcendent visions. In the summer of 1939, the Austrian-born Surrealist artist Wolfgang Paalen left Paris and journeyed to Alaska and British Columbia to experience First Nations culture. In Victoria, BC, he was introduced to Emily Carr and her paintings of the forests and the monumental art of the Northwest Coast. Paalen eventually settled in Mexico. His journey and his meetings with Carr opened the door to new possibilities in contemporary art. He renounced Surrealism in the belief that science and art could be brought together to transform contemporary consciousness by integrating “Amer-indian forms” into modern art.

“Vancouver Art Gallery has a renowned Emily Carr collection. In recent years, we have invited artists and curators to produce exhibitions ‘in dialogue’ with Carr’s artwork, and this project is the 6th iteration of the series. Colin Browne, this exhibition’s curator, has delved into new territory with his exceptional research into the circumstances and the legacy of the eventful meetings between Carr and Paalen, weaving various historical threads into this exhibition and the accompanying publication. We invite our audiences to look at the first pairing of these two extraordinary artists with a new perspective,” said Kathleen S. Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

This project is one of the outcomes of the Vancouver Art Gallery’s exhibition *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art* (2011), curated by Dawn Ades, which highlighted the Surrealists’ profound interest in the Indigenous arts of the Northwest Coast. Among the artists exhibited, Wolfgang Paalen piqued the interest of writer and filmmaker Colin Browne, who set about tracing the relationship between Emily Carr and Paalen.

Colin Browne, the exhibition’s curator, added “I first saw Wolfgang Paalen’s astonishing painting, *Les cosmogones*, a little over two years ago. Its resonance with his experience in British Columbia was palpable. We now know much more about that experience and about his meetings with Emily Carr in August of 1939. At

first glance the two could not have been more different, yet they immediately recognized and appreciated one another. Paalen, Carr wrote, was 'very enthusiastic' about her work—hardly what she expected from a Surrealist. Both shared a profound appreciation for the achievements of the Indigenous artists of the Northwest Coast. Almost eighty years after their meeting, we are bringing their iconic works together for the first time. I wish they could join us!"

About Emily Carr

Emily Carr, born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1871, is one of Canada's most renowned artists and is noted as a landscape painter who brought the then-radical vision of Modernism to the wilderness of British Columbia. The most important artist of her generation from this province, she is best known for her attention to the totemic carvings of the First Nations people of British Columbia and the rain forests of Vancouver Island.

About Wolfgang Paalen

Born in 1905, Wolfgang Paalen grew up in Silesia, Vienna and Berlin. By 1929 he was in France, exhibiting and pursuing ethnographic art, ritual and shamanism. In 1935 he and his wife, the poet Alice Rahon, were invited to join the Surrealists, and the following year he participated in legendary 20th century exhibitions in Paris, London and New York. After visiting the Northwest Coast in 1939, Paalen settled in Mexico, renounced Surrealism, and dedicated himself to writing, publishing, painting and calling for a transformational contemporary art. He continued to paint and exhibit actively until his death in 1959.

About Colin Browne

Poet, essayist and documentary filmmaker Colin Browne is researching the history and legacy of the Surrealist fascination with Northwest Coast Indigenous art for a book entitled *Scavengers of Paradise*. An essay with the same title appeared in a catalogue published to accompany the Vancouver Art Gallery's 2011 exhibition *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art*. His documentary films include *Linton Garner: I Never Said Goodbye notes on the author* (2003), *Father and Son* (1992) and *White Lake* (1989), nominated for a Canadian Film Award as Best Feature Length Documentary. His books of poetry include *Ground Water* (2002), *The Shovel* (2007), *The Properties* (2102) and, most recently, *The Hatch* (2015). Until recently, Browne taught film production, film history and critical writing at the Simon Fraser University School for the Contemporary Arts, where he is Professor Emeritus.

This exhibition is accompanied by an 80-page colour catalogue co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Figure 1 Publishing Inc. in Vancouver.

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Images:

(left) Wolfgang Paalen, *Les cosmogones (The Cosmogons)*, 1944, oil on canvas, 245 x 237.5 cm, Collection of Rowland Weinstein, courtesy of Weinstein Gallery.

(right) Emily Carr, *Juice of Life*, 1938–39, oil on canvas, Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Gift of Dr. Ethlyn Trapp, Vancouver, Photo: Stephen Topfer, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

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IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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About the **Vancouver Art Gallery**: The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We thank everyone for their continuing generosity.