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Image credit: Lawren Harris, *Tamarack Swamp, Algoma*, 1920, oil on canvas
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Photo by Rachel Topham, Vancouver Art Gallery

Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibition *Lawren Harris: Canadian Visionary* an insight into the artistic evolution of the Group of Seven founding member

February 21, 2014, Vancouver, BC - Opening on **March 1, 2014**, the Vancouver Art Gallery's new exhibition *Lawren Harris: Canadian Visionary* marks the Gallery's first comprehensive solo presentation of works by Lawren Stewart Harris (1885-1970) in more than 50 years. Featuring 137 paintings, oil sketches and drawings, this compelling exhibition offers a rare and extensive overview of the artistic evolution of Harris, one of the most prominent figures in the history of Canadian art.

"This exhibition highlights the significant holdings of Lawren Harris' work in our permanent collection that celebrate his rich arts and culture legacy," said the Gallery's Director Kathleen S. Bartels. "We would like to thank members of Harris' family, private donors and public lenders whose generous contribution made this exhibition possible."

With 82 works from the Vancouver Art Gallery's permanent collection and 55 select loans from local and national collections on display, this exhibition traces Harris' artistic journey from the early years of the twentieth century to the mid-1960s and illustrates his move from representational art to abstraction. "Lawren Harris is a leader in exploring Canadian landscape and the pioneer who brought abstraction to Canadian art." says Ian Thom, Senior Curator-Historical at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Among many groundbreaking works in the exhibition is *Tamarack Swamp, Algoma* (1920), one of the most important landscape paintings in the Gallery's permanent collection. Personally donated to the Gallery by Harris' daughter Margaret H. Knox, this painting exemplifies how Harris turned a subject that was considered unattractive into a beautiful work of art. One of Harris' sketchbooks is also on view for the first time, reflecting on his transition to a non-representational expression of the spiritual. A Tumblr site (harrisdrawings.tumblr.com) is dedicated to sketches that have yet to be paired with their corresponding paintings, and audiences worldwide are invited to share their suggestions and comments.

Lawren Harris was born in Brantford, Ontario in 1885. He formed the Group of Seven with six colleagues (Franklin Carmichael, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and Frederick Varley) in 1920, which remains one of the most influential art movements in Canadian

history. This movement redefined the perception of this country's landscape as well as what was considered an appropriate subject matter for painters. After the dissolution of the Group in 1933, Harris ventured into the realm of abstraction at a time when most of the public was unwilling to follow this type of artistic expression. His abstract work reflected his interest in theosophy and biology, and his search for deeper spiritual meaning. In 1940, Harris moved to Vancouver where he remained until his death in 1970. During these later years, he became a central figure in the artistic life of British Columbia. He provided financial support to fellow artists that made early sketching trips into wilderness possible. He collected younger artists' works and encouraged the others to do so. An important leader in the life of the Vancouver Art Gallery, he was the driving force in the development of the Emily Carr Trust collection. Through both his life and his work, Harris helped establish an identity for Canadian art.

Lawren Harris: Canadian Visionary is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Ian M. Thom, Senior Curator-Historical.

A media preview with Ian Thom will take place on Thursday, February 27 at 9am in the Gallery. Media attending are requested to RSVP to Debra Zhou (dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca)

Related events:

Critical Reflections on Canadian Painting: Eli Bornowsky

Tuesday, April 1, 7pm, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Vancouver-based painter Eli Bornowsky will discuss the late work of Lawren Harris, speaking to the artist's turn to abstraction and the influence of spirituality and theosophical pursuits in his artistic process.

Curator's Tour: Ian Thom

Saturday, April 5, 3pm, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Senior Curator Ian Thom tours *Lawren Harris: Canadian Visionary*, providing an overview of the exhibition and a biographical background of the artist.

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Images are available upon request.

MEDIA INFORMATION:

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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.