

SASKATCHEWAN'S FAMED EMMA LAKE ARTISTS

Summer Workshops that Changed Canada



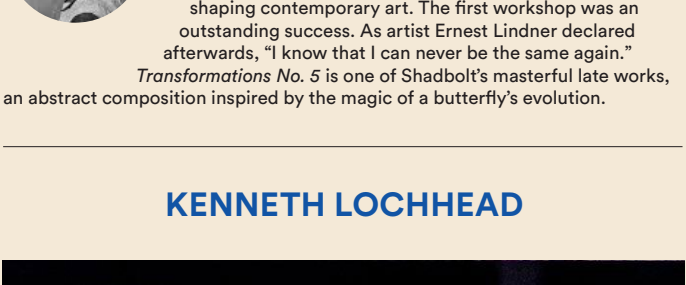
Clement Greenberg at the Emma Lake Artist Workshop, 1962. University of Regina Archives & Special Collections, Ken Lochhead Fonds, 86-29.



Sara Angel

You may think of August as the height of summer relaxation. For the Canadian art world, however, the month once marked a period of intense output and cultural transition. For over four decades, starting in 1955, the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops saw some of the most important gatherings in the nation's art history. Held at Murray Point in northern Saskatchewan, the program, which grew out of the Emma Lake Art Camp, was established by painters Arthur McKay and Kenneth Lochhead to invite contemporary artists and thinkers (usually from outside of Saskatchewan) to work and exchange ideas with leading local talent. The two-week-long August workshops set the country's visual culture in dramatic new modern directions, particularly in western Canada. To mark this historic moment in Canadian summers, we're spotlighting Emma Lake and some of its workshops' most celebrated Canadian attendees.

JACK SHADBOLT



Jack Shadbolt, *Transformations No. 5*, 1976, National Gallery of Canada



Every year, the Emma Lake organizers selected a different artist or critic from outside Saskatchewan to lead the activities. In 1955 Jack Shadbolt was the first invitee. The noted B.C. artist prepared a program of practical demonstrations and discussion topics about forces shaping contemporary art. The first workshop was an outstanding success. As artist Ernest Lindner declared afterwards, "I know that I can never be the same again." *Transformations No. 5* is one of Shadbolt's masterful late works, an abstract composition inspired by the magic of a butterfly's evolution.

KENNETH LOCHHEAD



Lithograph after Kenneth Lochhead, *Blue Extension*, c.1967



Originally from Ottawa, Kenneth Lochhead was Director at the School of Art at Regina College when he helped establish the Emma Lake workshops. He acted as their first coordinator, and they were critical to his own development as an artist. Famed American critic Clement Greenberg led the 1962 gathering, and he became a mentor to the Regina-based painter. Writing to Lochhead the year he painted *Blue Extension*, Greenberg commented, "You have no idea of how much I'm getting on Saskatchewan as N.Y.'s only competitor." In this composition, we see Lochhead's response to New York abstract art—a carefully balanced arrangement of strong colours in tension.

MARION NICOLL

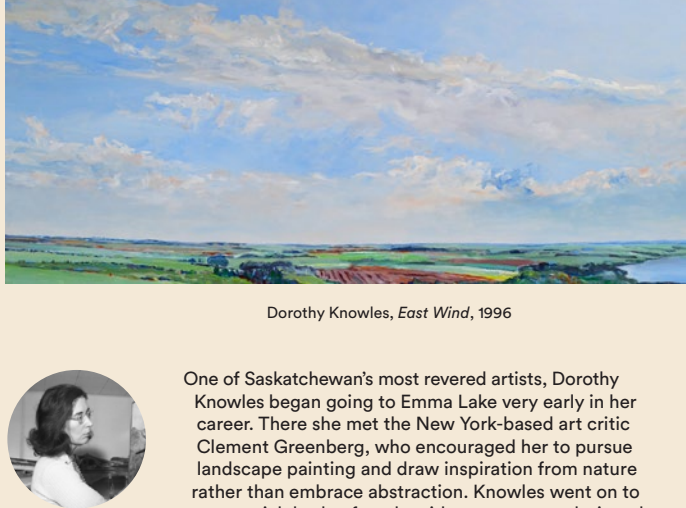


Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia*, 1959



Of the many women who attended the Emma Lake workshops, Marion Nicoll is one of the most celebrated. The Calgary artist was already committed to abstraction when she went to Emma Lake, but working with American artist Will Barnet in August 1957 inspired her to make a dramatic change in her art. In explaining her style, Nicoll stated that in her paintings "the power [is] held in the horizontal and vertical movements of the expanding colour shapes. There can be, for me, no overlapping transparencies or fuzzy edges"—a conviction that is evident in *Sicilia*.

ROY KIYOOKA

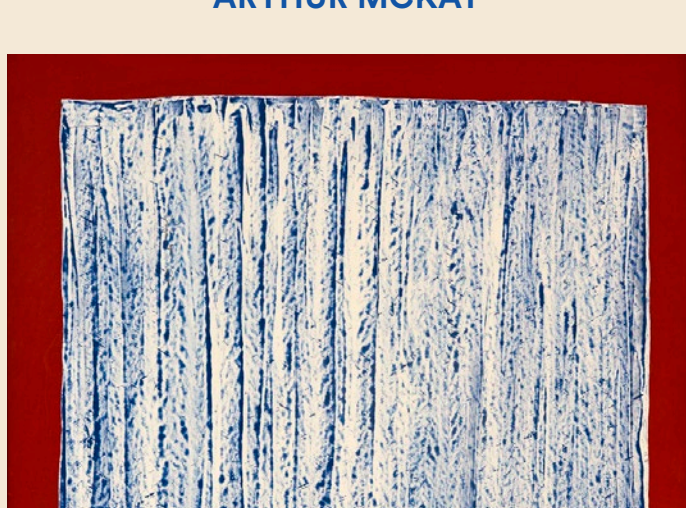


Roy Kiyooka, *Emma Lake*, 1958, National Gallery of Canada

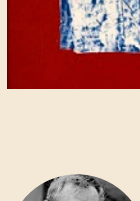


Japanese-Canadian artist Roy Kiyooka was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and in the 1950s he was a teacher in Regina, working alongside Kenneth Lochhead. He participated in the August workshops many times and *Emma Lake* speaks to his spirit of experimentation. In this modest painting Kiyooka played with patterns and the juxtaposition of delicate watercolours, perhaps inspired by the lake itself. He looked back on his time there with fond memories, noting that he and the friends who were involved "were all birthing our own painterly visions."

DOROTHY KNOWLES

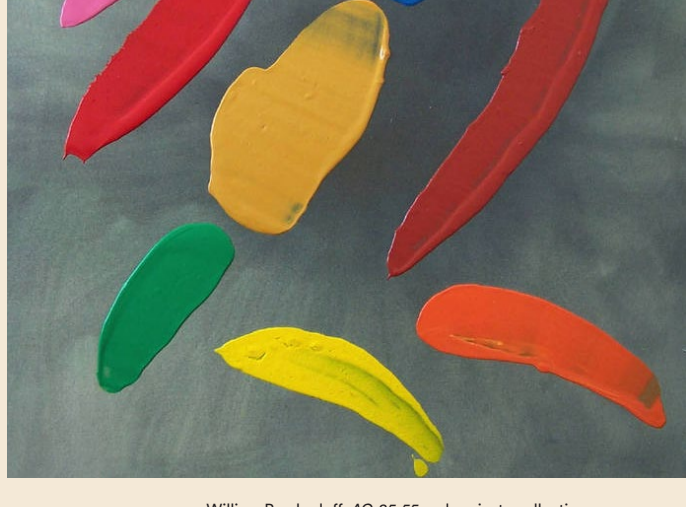


Dorothy Knowles, *East Wind*, 1996

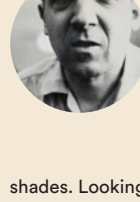


One of Saskatchewan's most revered artists, Dorothy Knowles began going to Emma Lake very early in her career. There she met the New York-based art critic Clement Greenberg, who encouraged her to pursue landscape painting and draw inspiration from nature rather than embrace abstraction. Knowles went on to create a rich body of work, with many scenes designed to celebrate the enormous expanse and beauty of prairie skies. Knowles and her husband, artist William Perehudoff, built their own cottage at the lake and she painted many views in the area.

DOUGLAS MORTON

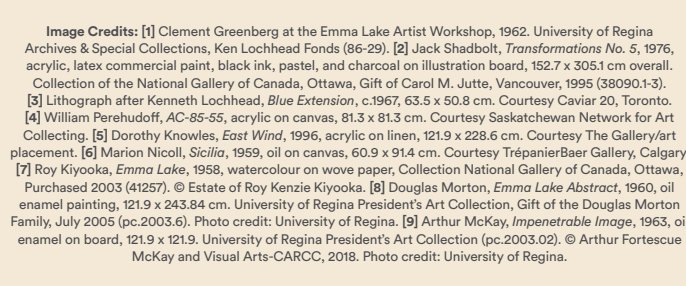


Douglas Morton, *Emma Lake Abstract*, 1960, University of Regina



Originally from Winnipeg, by 1953 Douglas Morton had settled in Regina. Over the course of several summers he attended Emma Lake regularly. He completed *Emma Lake Abstract* the year that the workshop was led by the American artist John Ferren. Morton delighted in the playful possibilities of abstraction, trying out different types of paint and tools, such as ketchup squeeze bottles, to produce interesting effects. The vivid tones in *Emma Lake Abstract* are typical of his work – as fellow artist Ronald Bloore commented, "it is always a liberating experience... to be refreshed by the dynamic Morton colours."

ARTHUR MCKAY



Arthur McKay, *Impenetrable Image*, 1963, University of Regina



In 1959 Saskatchewan-born Arthur McKay was a coordinator for one of Emma Lake's most famed workshops. That year the iconic New York painter Barnett Newman was a guest instructor. On first being approached, Newman quipped "Where the hell is Saskatchewan, and who is Emma Lake?" but he embraced the event wholeheartedly, inspiring many of the attendees. Critiquing McKay's work, Newman challenged him, saying, "You have a really good painting here...is that *all* you want to do?" McKay went on to make a radical change in his art, experimenting with palette knives to create paintings with distinctive surface patterns, as can be seen in *Impenetrable Image*.

WILLIAM PEREHUDOFF



William Perehudoff, *AC-85-55*, n.d., private collection

Saskatoon-born William Perehudoff was working as a commercial artist when he first began attending the Emma Lake workshops. Although he had limited time available for his painting, he was committed to developing it, and in 1963 he was inspired by Kenneth Noland, the visiting American colour-field painter. Perehudoff soon became known for his abstract works that capture luminous tones through translucent stains and glazes (as in the background of *AC-85-55*), opaque geometric forms, and thick dabs of bright shades. Looking back over his career, he reflected, "You have to let colour come

If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it.

SHARE

READ PAST NEWSLETTERS

THANK YOU TO OUR BENEFACTORS

The ACI is a not-for-profit educational charity that receives no government financing or public support. Our work is made possible by an important circle of [friends, patrons, and benefactors](#). If you would like to support our important work, please see [this page](#).

Image Credits: [1] Clement Greenberg at the Emma Lake Artist Workshop, 1962. University of Regina Archives & Special Collections, Ken Lochhead Fonds (86-29). [2] Jack Shadbolt, *Transformations No. 5*, 1976, acrylic, latex commercial paint, black ink, pastel, and charcoal on illustration board, 152.7 x 305.1 cm overall. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Gift of Carol M. Jutte, Vancouver, 1995 (38090.1-3). [3] Lithograph after Kenneth Lochhead, *Blue Extension*, c.1967, 63.5 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy Caviar 20, Toronto. [4] William Perehudoff, *AC-85-55*, acrylic on canvas, 81.3 x 81.3 cm. Courtesy Saskatchewan Network for Art Collecting. [5] Dorothy Knowles, *East Wind*, 1996, acrylic on linen, 121.9 x 228.6 cm. Courtesy The Gallery/art placement. [6] Marion Nicoll, *Sicilia*, 1959, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 91.4 cm. Courtesy TrépanierBeier Gallery, Calgary. [7] Roy Kiyooka, *Emma Lake*, 1958, watercolour on wove paper, Collection National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 2003 (41257). © Estate of Roy Kenzie Kiyooka. [8] Douglas Morton, *Emma Lake Abstract*, 1960, oil enamel painting, 121.9 x 243.84 cm. University of Regina President's Art Collection, Gift of the Douglas Morton Family, July 2005 (pc-2003.6). Photo credit: University of Regina. [9] Arthur McKay, *Impenetrable Image*, 1963, oil enamel on board, 121.9 x 121.9. University of Regina President's Art Collection (pc-2003.02). © Arthur Fortescue McKay and Visual Arts-CARCC, 2018. Photo credit: University of Regina.