

An abstract charcoal or pencil drawing on a light-colored paper. The drawing features a central, bright, sun-like figure with radiating lines, surrounded by various geometric and organic shapes, some of which appear to be hands or faces. The overall style is expressive and gestural, with heavy shading and cross-hatching.

# KATHLEEN MUNN

Life & Work

By Georgiana Uhlyarik

ART  
CANADA  
INSTITUTE  
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CANADIEN





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# BIOGRAPHY

Kathleen Munn (1887–1974) is recognized today as a pioneer of modern art in Canada, though she remained on the periphery of the Canadian art scene during her lifetime. She imagined conventional subjects in a radically new visual vocabulary as she combined the traditions of European art with modern art studies in New York. She died at age eighty-seven, unaware that her long-held hope for “a possible future for my work” was about to become reality.

**FAMILY LIFE**

Kathleen Jean Munn was born into a large, closely knit middle-class family in Toronto in 1887. The Munns' background was Methodist, but religion did not play a role in family life. James and Catherine (née Wetherald) Munn owned and ran a jewellery store at the intersection of Yonge and Bloor, and the family lived in the apartment above. They had three boys and three girls: Clarkson (died as an infant), William (ran the Munn store), Fredrick James (a doctor who died young), May (a teacher), Elizabeth Agnes (known as Marjorie, a teacher, moved to Manitoba), and Kathleen. Munn's parents valued education above all and supported the children's efforts to pursue their interests.



Munn in her Toronto studio in the 1930s.

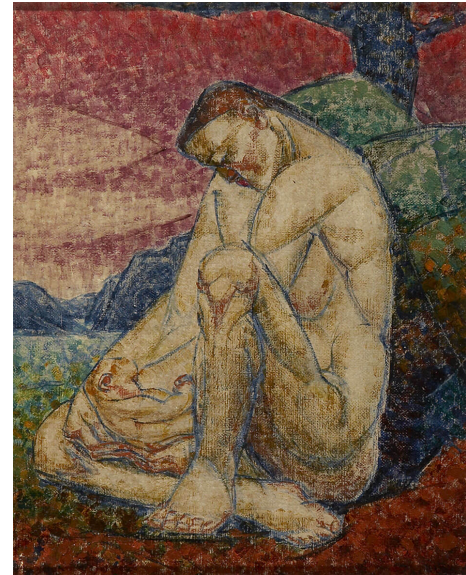
William, May, and Kathleen lived together as adults, moving from Yonge Street to a home on Spadina Road (south of St. Clair Avenue) in 1912 or 1913. A few years later Kathleen Munn had separate living quarters built onto the house, along with a studio with large windows facing west into the ravine.



Munn's singular commitment to art was fostered and protected first by her mother and then by her sister May. Catherine Munn paid for her daughter's art education, sending money and letters of encouragement while she studied in Philadelphia and New York in the 1910s. In the 1920s and 1930s, May Munn took care of all household duties so that her sister could focus on her art.

Around 1939, after her brother William died of diabetes and her sister May became physically disabled, Munn had to oversee the closing of the jewellery store business. She did not return to making art after this period. Following May's death in 1967, Munn lived in an apartment on Bathurst Street (near Sheppard Avenue) until her death in 1974.

Details of Munn's personal life are limited. There are no known private letters or journals, and those who knew her best have since passed away. She had a close circle of friends in the arts community, including Bertram Brooker (1888-1955), but never married and had no children. Munn's nephews and nieces remember her as devoted primarily to her art—a preoccupation she did not easily share and one not understood by most of them. They supported her nonetheless, and in return Munn was deeply attached to them. Her niece Kathleen (Kay) Richards took over the estate to safeguard Munn's artistic output.



Kathleen Munn, *Mother and Child*, c. 1930, oil on canvas laid down on paperboard, 26.1 x 20.5 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

## EARLY ART LIFE

I believe in myself, since it is all I have.

—Kathleen Munn, c. 1925

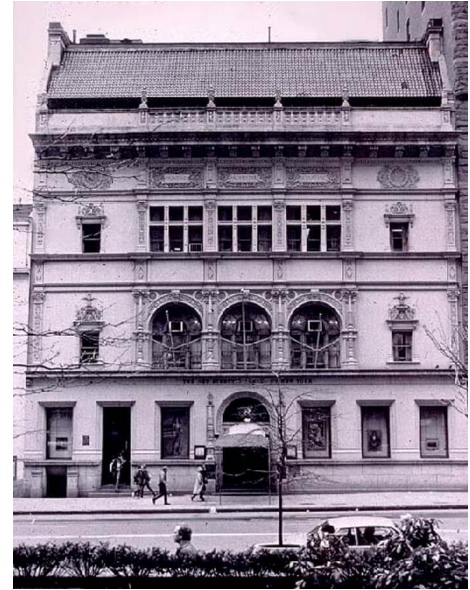
Munn's art spans three decades in the early twentieth century and plays an important role in the development of modern art in Canada. Her subject matter was established early and did not change: landscapes, figure studies, biblical themes, and still lifes.

Although Munn did not date or title her works unless they were included in an exhibition, her output can be divided into two categories. The first, from the period 1909-29, includes paintings that reflect her exploration of artistic movements such as Post-Impressionism and Cubism; the second, 1929-39, highlights her rigorous experimentation with dynamic symmetry, culminating in her most innovative series of drawings, the Passion series.

Munn's formal art training began when she attended Westbourne School in Toronto from 1904 to 1907 and studied with Farquhar McGillivray Knowles (1859–1932), a successful local landscape painter. Encouraged and talented, Munn began to show her work in 1909 in exhibitions with the Ontario Society of Artists and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and at the Canadian National Exhibition, receiving some attention in reviews. She continued to exhibit with these societies until the late 1920s.



*A Breezy Day*, 1903, by Munn's teacher Farquhar McGillivray Knowles, oil on canvas, 91.8 x 71.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Historical photograph of the Art Students League, New York.

In 1912 Munn began studies at the Art Students League (ASL) in New York—the renowned modern art school established in 1875 by artists for artists. There, through her teachers, she placed herself in the heart of the American avant-garde art movement and experimented with techniques and styles, such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Synchronism—a decision that distinguished her from most of her Canadian contemporaries.

Munn recorded her studies in Manhattan, as well as those at the ASL summer school in Woodstock, New York, in nine notebooks. She continued her studies at the ASL until the late 1920s. Munn considered her time in Woodstock as the most enjoyable of her life, and sometime in the 1920s she purchased property there hoping to build a studio. Unable to realize her plans, she sold it in the early 1940s.



Kathleen Munn's notebooks, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



In New York Munn was introduced to the writings of Jay Hambidge (1867–1924), an artist and writer who developed the influential theory of dynamic symmetry. She likely attended his lectures as early as 1919. Hambidge's essays confirmed for Munn the primacy of the human form and suggested to her the basis of a methodology for its representation.

Munn probably met Canadian artist and writer Bertram Brooker sometime in the mid-1920s.

Inviting her to weekly gatherings in his home, he became Munn's primary conduit into an important intellectual circle that included key members of the Group of Seven and collectors Ruth and Harold Tovell as well as foreign cultural luminaries visiting Toronto, such as Walter Pach and Katherine Dreier.

Brooker collected two of her works:

*Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927, and *Composition (Reclining Nude)*, c. 1926–28.

Munn also participated in the informal art classes he arranged. In 1935 Brooker was central to the organization of *Exhibition of Drawings by Kathleen Munn, LeMoine FitzGerald, Bertram Brooker*, at the Malloney Galleries in Toronto.

When Munn painted *Untitled I*, c. 1926–28—which was originally, with *Untitled II*, part of a larger canvas—it was among the first purely abstract works made in Canada. In *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928–1929* (edited by Bertram Brooker), Frederick Housser wrote about Munn, echoing other critics' assessment that Toronto audiences were not ready for her "advanced" art; he also inaccurately referred to her as a recluse.



Portrait of Bertram Brooker (1888–1955),  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Kathleen Munn, *Composition (Horses)*, c.  
1927, oil on canvas, 51 x 60.7 cm, Art  
Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton.



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled I*, c. 1926-28, oil on canvas, 37 x 60 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Munn was a devoted modernist and read widely on topics ranging from the history and theory of art and design to poetry and philosophy. Her library included a wide selection: art books in English and also in Italian, German, and French (it is not known if she was fluent in these languages); several monographs on El Greco, Rembrandt, Ingres, Cézanne, Picasso, and Tintoretto; books on the Vatican and ancient art from Greece, Egypt, Byzantium, South America, Africa, India, and Asia; and a book on the anatomy of the cow. Her intellectual pursuits were complemented by her travels to Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and her repeated visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. These activities were foundational in her development as an artist.

### THE PASSION SERIES

In the late 1920s Munn embarked on a meticulous process of experimentation, producing over a thousand drawings and sketches on the Passion of Christ—studies for ten large final works that are considered her most significant body of work. This process was a radical refinement in her artistic vision. After a nearly twenty-year commitment to the primacy of colour and painting, she focused almost exclusively on drawing and worked with black ink and graphite. Such continual experimentation and refinement are at the core of Munn's work.



Whereas Christ's Passion is canonical in European art, it was an unusual focus for a modernist in Ontario. What meaning did the Passion scenes have for Munn? Late in life she reflected, "The subjects for the pen and ink series came up irresistibly. I found my drawings suggested religious subjects from some depth in myself."<sup>1</sup>

The final works in Munn's Passion series consist of eight large ink drawings from 1934-35 and two large graphite drawings from 1938. The drawings are the result of an intense and methodical process of her own that she devised and practised for years with rigour and perspicacity.



Kathleen Munn, *Last Supper*, 1938, graphite on paper, 38.7 x 49.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

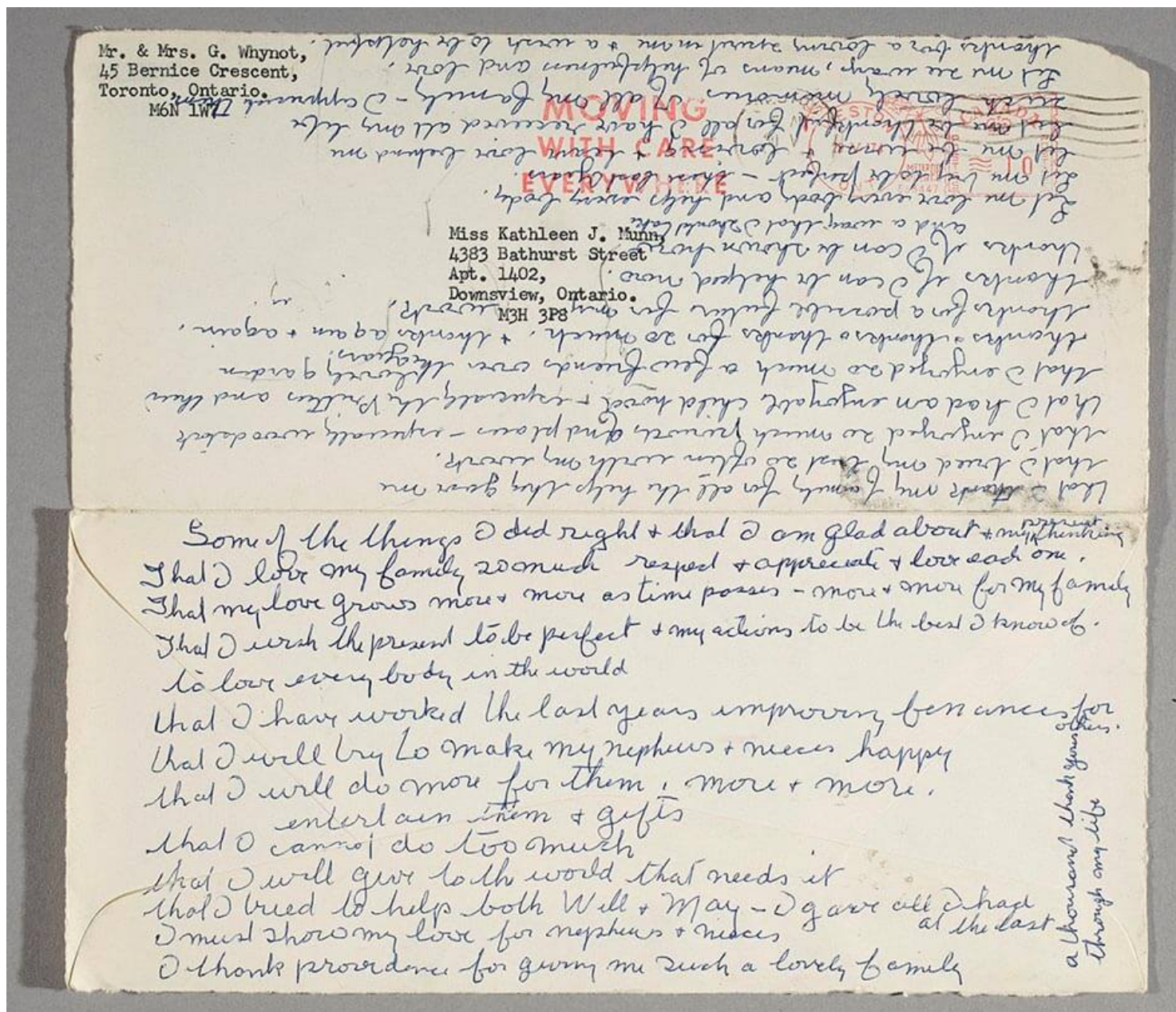
Munn drew six components of the Passion narrative: Last Supper (twice), Agony in the Garden, Christ's Arrest, Crucifixion (twice), Descent from the Cross (twice), and Ascension (twice). She exhibited some of these along with other works on paper in 1935 at Malloney Galleries in Toronto in a group show with Bertram Brooker and Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890-1956). She also displayed them on a few other occasions in the 1940s. In the spring of 1974, when curators from the National Gallery of Canada visited Munn, her walls were covered with these drawings. Indeed, these are the works Munn intended to be known for.

## ART ABANDONED

Munn gradually abandoned her artmaking around 1940, likely owing to a combination of events. For the first time, family duties distracted her from the studio. Also, now in her fifties, she suffered from cataracts and, more importantly, from a sustained lack of critical attention to her work. Although Munn had been included in two Group of Seven exhibitions, in 1928 and 1930, she was discouraged by the group's dominance.

Munn's artistic pursuits, rooted in New York modernism, differed from those of most of the Group of Seven artists, who were committed to a national art movement. This distinction is significant in why she has not played a more prominent role in Canadian art history. Although recognized in the twenties and thirties as one of the most "advanced" women artists in Canada, Munn remained on the periphery of the Canadian art scene. After she stopped making art, her work was largely forgotten.





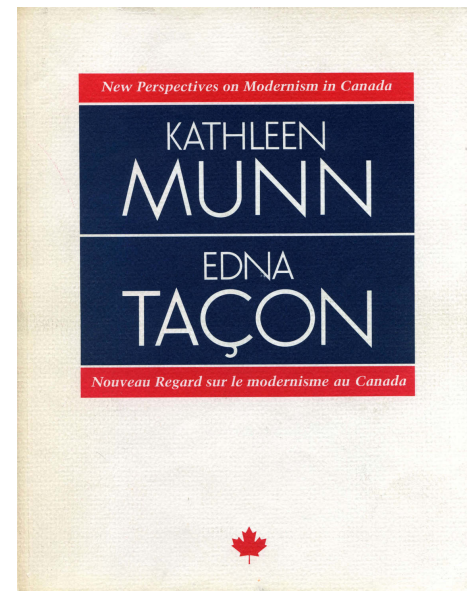
On an envelope dated May 28, 1974, Kathleen Munn listed "some of the things I did right and ... my present thinking." Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

In 1974 Charles Hill and Rosemary Tovell, two curators from the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), visited Munn in Toronto while researching the exhibition *Canadian Painting in the Thirties*. Subsequently, one of her final Passion series works was selected for purchase by the NGC. After decades of obscurity, Munn wrote of her hope: "a possible future for my work."<sup>2</sup> She did not live to see this happen. In October that year, before the sale was complete, she died, never knowing that her artistic achievements were soon to be recognized.



In the mid-1980s scholars and curators, led by York University professor Joyce Zemans, began the important process of recovering Munn's work. The exhibition *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada* reintroduced Kathleen Munn and affirmed her contribution to the history of modern art in Canada. As a result of this touring exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, her work was soon sought after by important private and public collections across Canada. Since then a number of travelling exhibitions and catalogues have established Munn's important role.

During her lifetime Munn sold or gifted very few works. Her only sale to an art museum took place in 1945 when the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario) purchased two of her drawings from the Passion series. No other works entered public collections until 1971, when the Art Gallery of Hamilton received a donation of her painting *Mother and Child*, c. 1930. Since very few of Munn's works were collected privately, her family was left a comprehensive record of her artistic output. Her estate also included her extensive library as well as her rich and significant archives, now housed at the Art Gallery of Ontario.



The 1988 catalogue for the touring exhibition that established Munn's role in the development of modern art in Canada.



An abstract painting featuring a dense composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is rich and varied, including deep blues, vibrant reds, bright yellows, and earthy greens. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity, with no discernible figures or objects.

# KEY WORKS

Kathleen Munn's key works can be divided into two groups. The first group, from the period 1909–29, focuses on paintings reflecting her exploration of several related artistic movements, such as Post-Impressionism and Cubism; the second, 1929–39, highlights her rigorous experimentation with dynamic symmetry, culminating in her most innovative series of drawings, the Passion series.



## UNTITLED (STUDY OF COWS) C. 1910



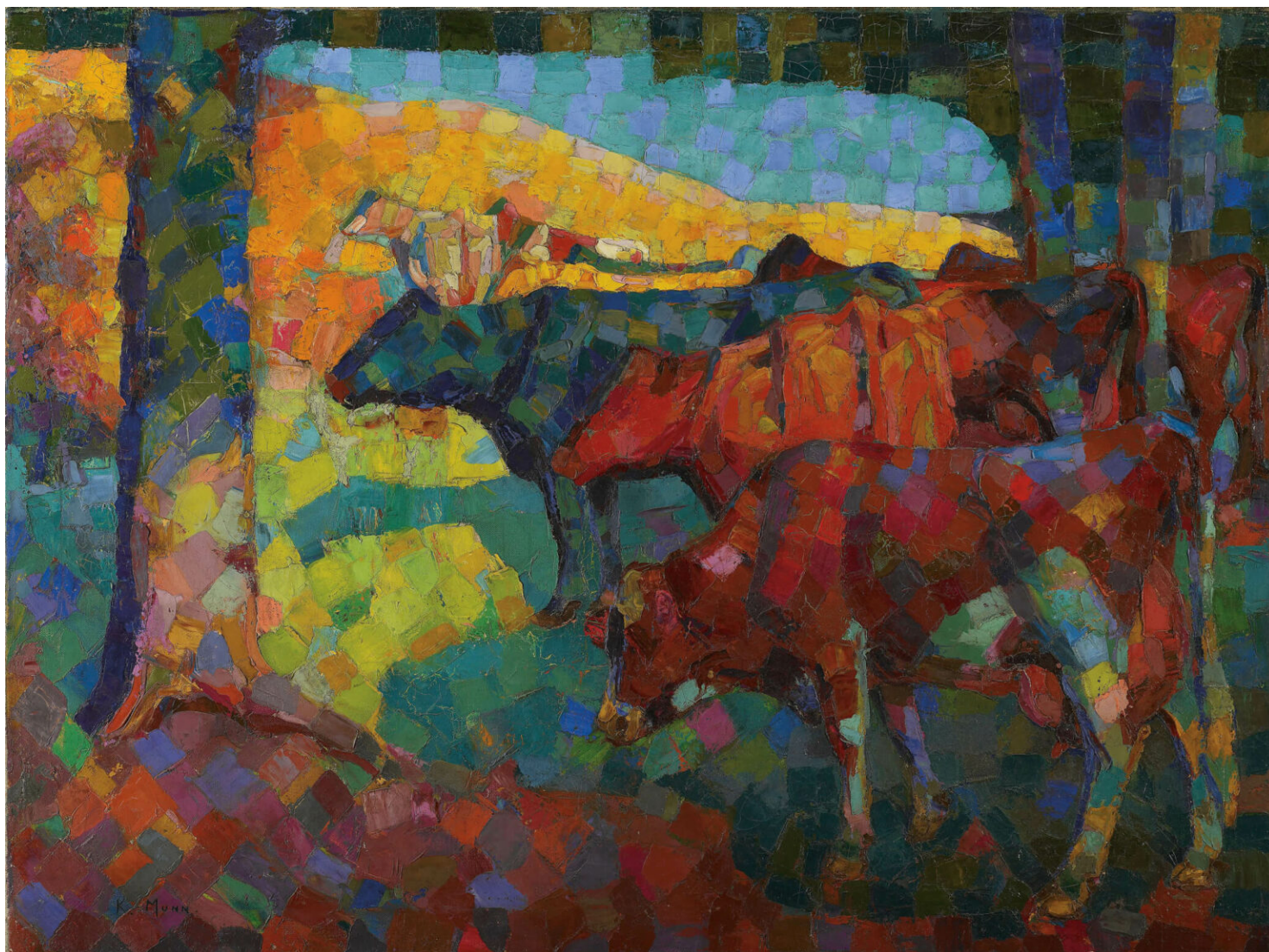
Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Study of Cows)*, c. 1910  
Oil on canvas, 34 x 40 cm  
Private collection

Kathleen Munn's first truly modern paintings are, extraordinarily, of cows, chickens, and pigs. Such pastoral subject matter was popular in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Munn's early colourful impressionistic studies were likely executed in 1909 during and following her visit to her sister's Manitoba farm, which she also photographed for reference.

This painting and similar ones in which Munn depicted farm animals with bold, thick brushwork already exhibit a vibrant use of colour and were likely executed as precursors to her 1915-16 large canvases of farm animals, such as *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916.



## UNTITLED (COWS ON A HILLSIDE) C. 1916



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916

Oil on canvas, 76.3 x 101.7 cm

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Here Munn builds the image in an unusual way—using a pattern of flat rectangular patches of colour laid down to create a unified surface—to achieve a sense of space, while maintaining a tremendous naturalness in the animals' depiction. Especially delightful is her rendering of the cow's backside, just right of centre in the painting.

This work is closely related to those of contemporary German Expressionist painter Franz Marc (1880–1916) and others associated with the influential Blaue Reiter group. Munn's farm animal paintings from the mid-1910s signalled a dramatic evolution in her work: her animals graze in carefully arranged kaleidoscopes of bold colours and are unlike any painted in Canada at the time. During her studies in New York and her frequent visits to galleries and museums there, she was exposed to the most advanced art of her time. Strident colour began to dominate her



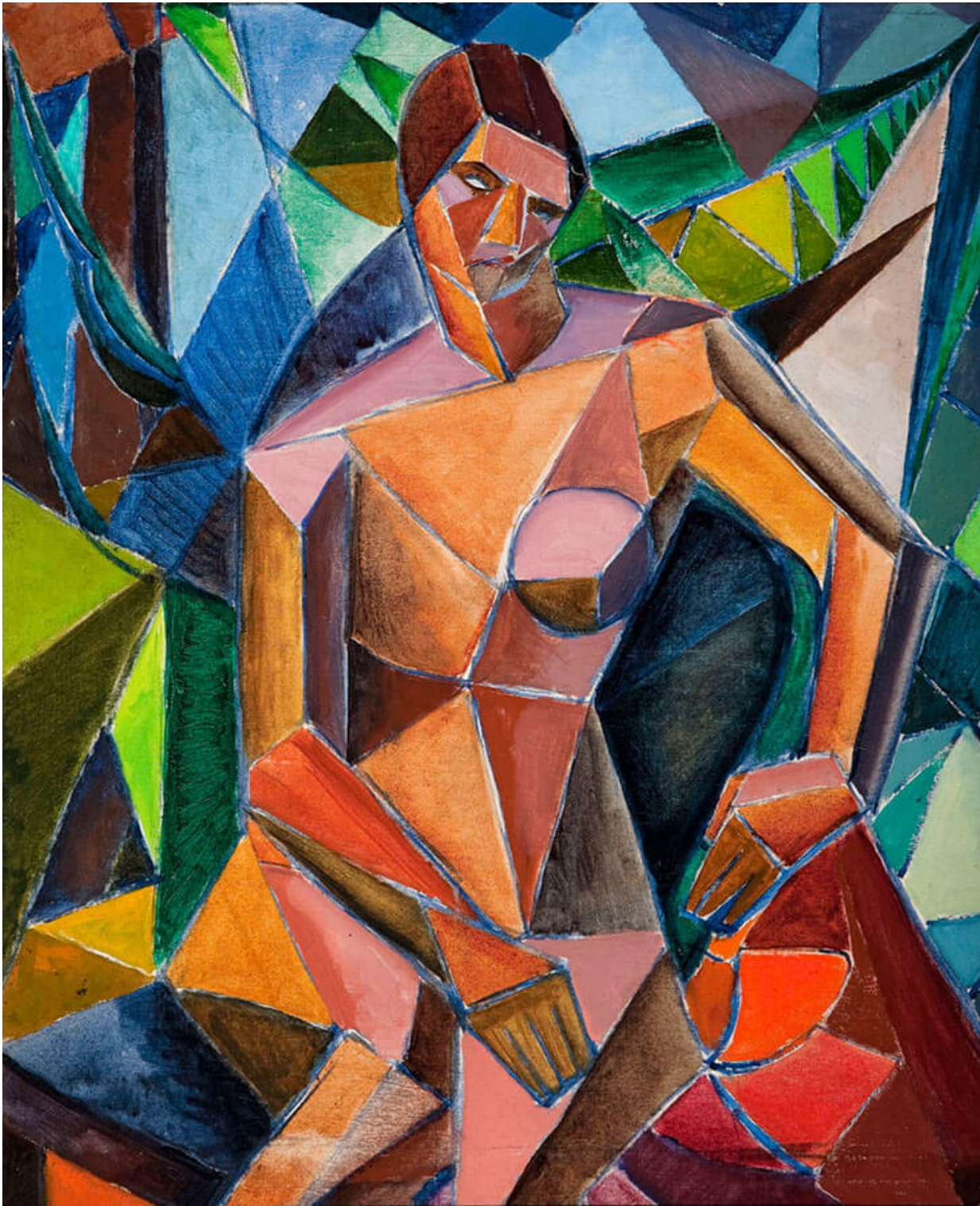




Franz Marc, *The Dream*, 1912, oil on canvas, 100.5 x 135.5 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

painting: she was influenced by her explorations of Synchromist colour theory and by the work of Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890–1973) and her teacher Max Weber (1881–1961), both proponents of the use of colour to define form and release paintings from a literal description.

## UNTITLED (NUDE IN FOREST) C. 1923



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Nude in Forest)*, c. 1923  
Oil on canvas, 54.5 x 45 cm  
Private collection

This compelling painting of a female nude reveals the underlying geometry of Munn's figurative compositions, based on a study of classical proportions. It is rooted in these principles, yet decidedly modern. The image attests to Munn's interest in formal concerns and to her skills as a colourist. Also, the manner in which she renders the subject's facial features and builds the blocks of the figure



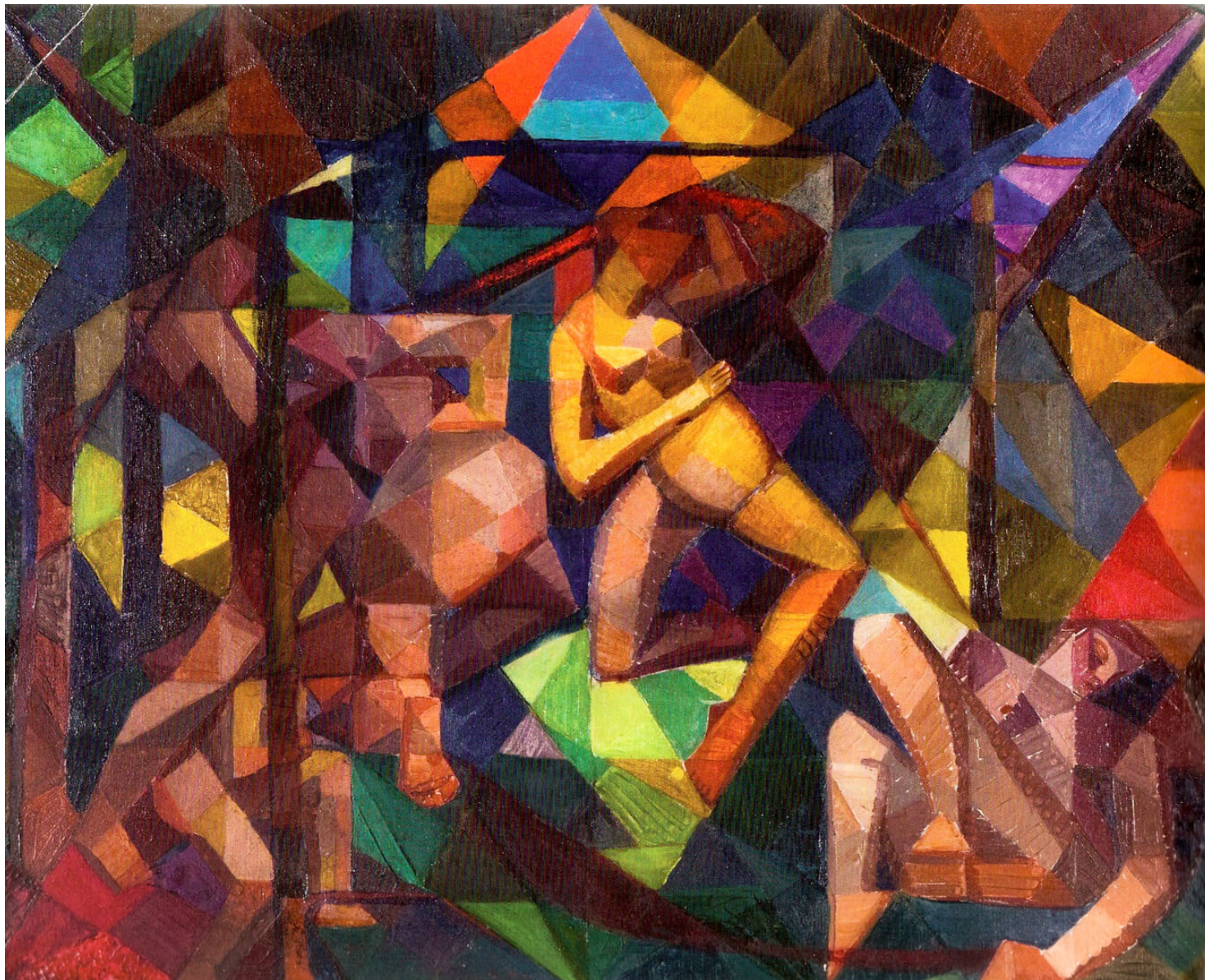


suggests that she was already influenced by the theory of dynamic symmetry, developed by Jay Hambidge (1867–1924).

Munn is remarkable for her commitment to the nude as an important subject in art, especially in light of the well-documented discomfort of Toronto audiences in the 1920s and 1930s with such paintings. In 1927 nudes by her American teacher Max Weber (1881–1961) were removed from the walls of the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario).

Stylistically related to *The Dance*, c. 1923, this painting has been dated to the mid-1920s. The “nude in forest” reference was added in the 1990s as an offhand description of the painting.

## THE DANCE C. 1923



Kathleen Munn, *The Dance*, c. 1923  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm  
Private collection

One of Munn's most accomplished paintings, *The Dance* includes five stylized female nudes, each in a dynamic pose built out of triangles of colour. The work reflects the influence of Synchronism. Munn's choice to take on classic imagery made famous by such European giants as Edgar Degas (1834–1917) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954) demonstrates how she confidently set her artistic ambitions within the international modern art movement. Notably, a print of Matisse's *Dance (I)*, 1909, hung in Munn's studio.



This work demonstrates how, by the early 1920s, Kathleen Munn had refined her experimentations with colour to achieve a rhythm and composition akin to musicality, an attribute much sought after by artists engaged with abstraction. Importantly, around this time she declared in her notebook that “the outworn beauty is the beauty of mere appearances. The new beauty is the beauty of principles. Not the world aspect but the world order.”<sup>1</sup> Such ideas framed her artistic vision and inspired the scope of her mature work: the sustained investigation of the idealized human figure. Significantly, Munn chose the human figure above all other subjects in her search of “new beauty.”



Munn in her Toronto studio in the 1930s.



Henri Matisse, *Dance (I)*, 1909, oil on canvas, 259.7 x 390.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Munn exhibited *The Dance* at the annual exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1923. It stood out dramatically from other paintings: the *Mail and Empire* critic described it as “unique” and a “futuristic painting with a cubist suggestion.”<sup>2</sup> Although noted and appreciated, *The Dance* was not fully understood at the time. Reviewer Newton MacTavish suggested that “Miss Munn ought to be on hand to explain her art theories for she must have them.”<sup>3</sup>

Munn rarely titled and dated her work. This painting’s exhibition history, however, allows scholars to date it and other paintings and thus better understand Munn’s development as an artist.



## STILL LIFE C. 1925



Kathleen Munn, *Still Life*, c. 1925  
Oil on canvas, 54.5 x 44.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton





Likely painted in the 1920s, this work is a formal exploration of space, shape, and composition. Here Munn's palette is muted and limited in tonal range, marking a significant shift in her use of colour in painting. The objects and background are modelled; Munn is not overly interested in texture or light. Munn painted few still lifes, but she was inspired by paintings of apples by Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and often drew this subject.

This still life is notable for including a crucifix, the tau cross. An atypical and archaic version of the crucifix, it was depicted predominantly in early medieval imagery. Munn depicted the tau cross exclusively in all her Passion series work.

## COMPOSITION (RECLINING NUDE) C. 1926–28



Kathleen Munn, *Composition (Reclining Nude)*, c.1926–28  
Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 53.3 cm  
Collection of Lynn and Ken Martens

This is an important composition for Munn, successfully achieving the simplicity and clarity she rigorously sought in her ongoing preoccupation with the formal integration of the figure in landscape.

In Munn's paintings the same figure is often repeated, rotated, or foreshortened. By the 1930s this becomes an almost obsessive concern of hers. Here she distills the basic natural elements into a series of overlapping triangular planes and primary colours. The reclining figure—a modular pyramid that echoes the triangular shapes—is a more foreshortened version of the figure in the bottom right corner of *The Dance*, c. 1923.





Munn was particularly proud of *Composition (Reclining Nude)*. She included it in the 1928 Group of Seven exhibition (which provides us with its accurate date and title), and she made a monoprint based on this composition.

This work was one of two paintings owned by Bertram Brooker (1888–1955); the other is *Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927.

## UNTITLED (DEPOSITION) C. 1926–28



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Deposition)*, c. 1926–28

Oil on canvas, 41.2 x 55.6 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

This untitled depiction of the Deposition belongs to the second group of paintings in Munn's Passion series, which were likely produced into the 1930s. These are much more schematic and complex than her first group of compositions such as *Untitled (Crucifixion)*, c. 1927–28. *Untitled (Deposition)* appears unfinished, the underpainting and compositional lines visible. It is an experiment in paint of Munn's explorations of dynamic symmetry principles. The most intriguing feature is the reduction of landscape to nearly unrecognizable natural forms, recalling her pure abstractions from the same period, such as *Untitled I*, c. 1926–28.



## UNTITLED I C. 1926–28

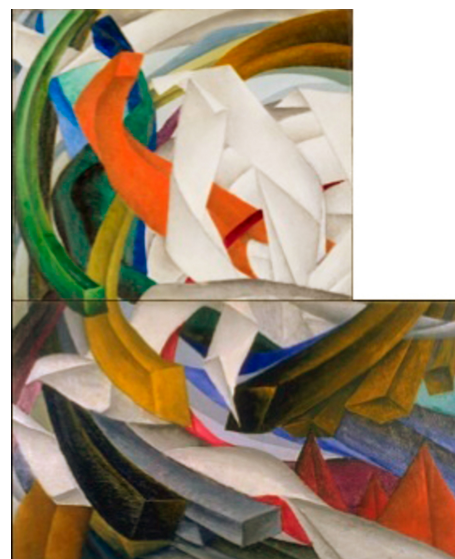


Kathleen Munn, *Untitled I*, c. 1926–28  
Oil on canvas, 37 x 60 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

*Untitled I* is among the first purely abstract paintings made in Canada. References to natural landscape forms are discernible in the solid shapes of primary colours dynamically organized in this composition. These abstract shapes appear in many of Munn's paintings from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Munn experimented in step with her friend Bertram Brooker (1888–1955), who exhibited his abstract paintings in January 1927.

Until recently *Untitled I* was believed to be one of two surviving abstract paintings by Munn, its companion piece being *Untitled II*. While restoring *Untitled II* in 2012–13, Michael O'Malley, painting conservator at the Centre de conservation du Québec (CCQ), discovered that these two paintings originally formed a single canvas, which was cut apart, almost certainly by the artist, with a fragment now missing.

It is unlikely that Munn exhibited this work. Along with *Untitled II*, the unframed canvas was found rolled up and stored among Munn's many belongings inherited by her niece Kathleen (Kay) Richards.



When *Untitled I* and *Untitled II* are placed together, the full power of the original painting is revealed. (A fragment of the original canvas has been lost.) The original painting measured 75 x 60 cm.



## COMPOSITION (HORSES) C. 1927



Kathleen Munn, *Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927

Oil on canvas, 51 x 60.7 cm

Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

This painting's subject matter is familiar territory for Munn: horses, bulls, and cows in the landscape; however, its title reveals an important aspect of her matured attitude toward painting. The word "composition"—referring to how the formal elements of the painting work together—attests to her affinity with the ideas of art and spirituality of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), discussed in his key text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Bertram Brookner (1888–1955), also influenced by this writing, called the painting Munn's most "musical"<sup>1</sup>—at the time, Brookner was exploring the links between music and painting. He owned *Composition (Horses)* and reproduced it in his *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*, 1928–1929. It was included in the 1928 Group of Seven exhibition, along with *Composition (Reclining Nude)*, c. 1926–28, also owned by Brookner.



## UNTITLED (DESCENT FROM THE CROSS) C. 1927



Kathleen MUNN  
TORONTO, 1930(?)

Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Descent from the Cross)*, c. 1927  
Monoprint on paper, 43 x 30.3 cm  
Private collection





Munn's *Untitled (Descent from the Cross)*, part of her Passion series, is closely related in style to her late 1920s paintings of crucifixions, including *Untitled (Crucifixion)*, c. 1927–28. Clearly the Passion cycle as subject matter had already fully resonated with her by the mid-1920s. She began exploring it in a variety of media after taking printmaking classes at the Art Students League summer school.

In the Christian faith the Descent from the Cross, or Deposition of Christ, is part of Jesus Christ's fourteen Stations of the Cross—also known as the Passion cycle. Following Christ's death by crucifixion, the scene typically depicts the removal of his body from the cross by his family and disciples prior to burial. Here the Descent is depicted with expressionistic and loose ink strokes, the figures and landscape barely distinguishable in the dramatic composition. A jagged thunderbolt-like shape points to the central figure, identifying it as Christ's lifeless body. Prosaically, a ladder is depicted behind the cross, a detail that disappears in later compositions.

This monoprint was a gift from Munn to Harold and Ruth Tovell, important art collectors in Toronto, with whom she shared a strong commitment to avant-garde art as well as a deep interest in the history of art. The gift was recorded by the Tovells, and thus the print can be roughly dated; it is understood to be one of her earliest known explorations of these themes.

## UNTITLED (CRUCIFIXION) C. 1927–28



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Crucifixion)*, c. 1927-28  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm  
Private collection

Munn explores the theme of the Passion of Christ in two styles of painting, spanning the late 1920s and early 1930s. *Untitled (Crucifixion)* is likely the first to explore the theme in dark brown, rich greys, and blacks with block figures inserted into abstracted land forms. These elemental forms are present in her charcoal drawings from the same period. This work is also stylistically related to *Still Life*, c. 1925.



## UNTITLED (FOUR FIGURES IN THE WOODS) C. 1928–30



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Four Figures in the Woods)*, c. 1928–30

Oil on canvas, 61.1 x 58 cm

Private collection

*Untitled (Four Figures in the Woods)* is not an entirely successful resolution of figure and landscape. Munn, in effect, painted a single figure from different views in one composition: the four bathers are views of one self-replicating figure seen through a prism and rotated vertically and horizontally, from the front and back. Here Munn paints the conceptualized human body, expressed in its most idealized form.



## UNTITLED (TWO NUDES IN A LANDSCAPE) C. 1928–30



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Two Nudes in a Landscape)*, c. 1928–30

Oil on canvas, 50.9 x 61.6 cm

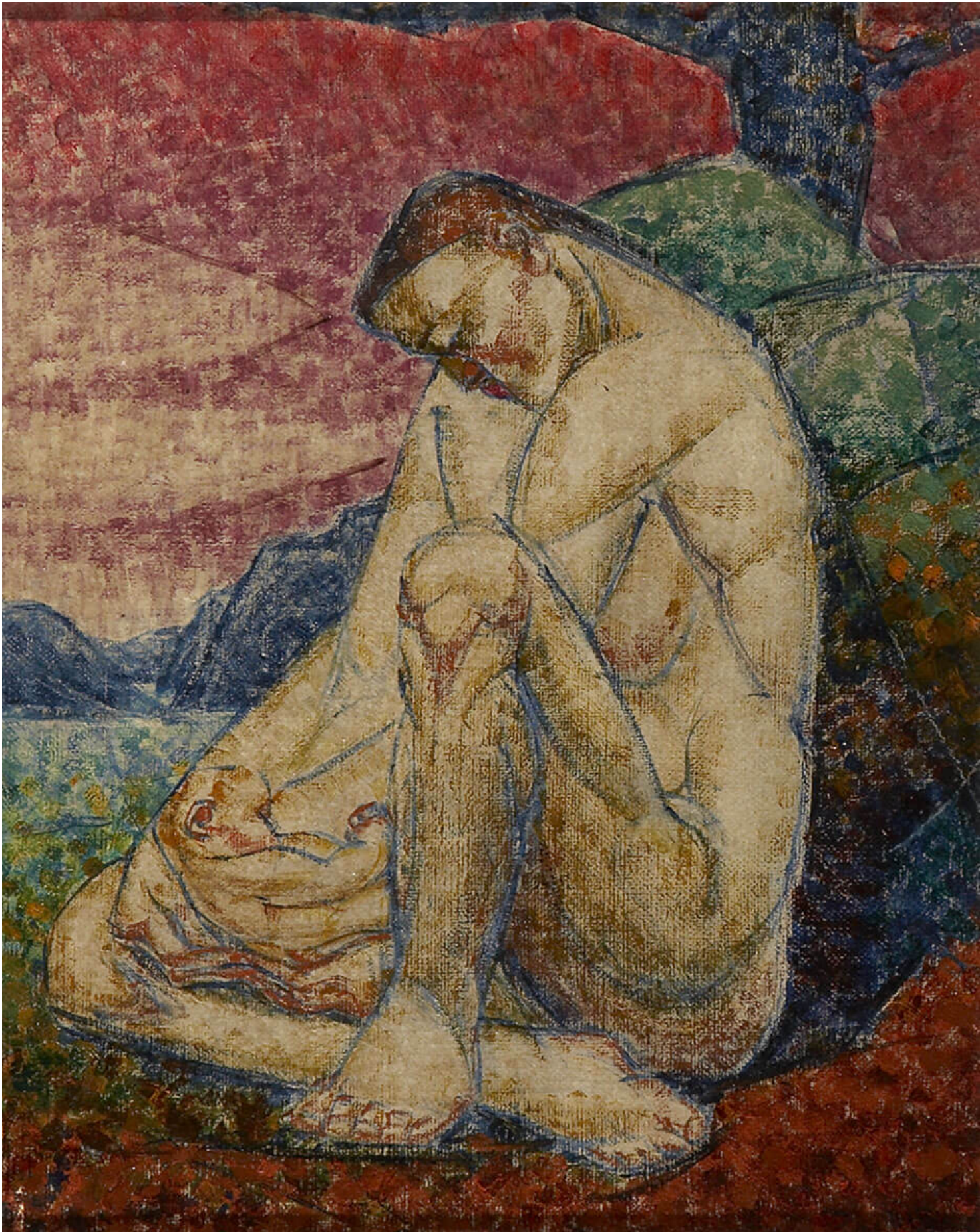
Private collection

Here Munn is interested in a group of figures interacting in space, as in *Untitled (Four Figures in the Woods)*, c. 1928–30.

Kathleen Munn's paintings from the late 1920s onward are permutations of her central pictorial concern to resolve the depiction of the figure in the landscape. Here she uses the classical subject of "the bathers" to explore how figures integrate with the natural landscape features. Stylistically, this work builds upon her use of colour and paint application that she began with *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916.



## MOTHER AND CHILD C. 1930



Kathleen Munn, *Mother and Child*, c. 1930  
Oil on canvas laid down on paperboard, 26.1 x 20.5 cm  
Art Gallery of Hamilton





This work is a reimagining of a Virgin and Child composition. The mother is a monumental figure, heroic in her nudity, fully cradling the small child within her shape. It recalls the paintings of poet and artist William Blake (1757–1827), whose work Munn knew and admired.

The history of this painting offers clues as to how Munn's work was regarded by her colleagues in the Toronto art scene. *Mother and Child* belonged to art critic and author Frederick Housser, who wrote about Munn in *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928–1929*, edited by Bertram Brooker (1888–1955). He echoed other critics' assessment that Toronto audiences were not ready for her advanced art, but he also inaccurately referred to her as a recluse. His impressions of Munn might have been influenced by her lack of interest in the national art school that he advocated in *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (1926). Housser's second wife, painter Yvonne McKague Housser (1897–1996), inherited the painting and donated it to the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 1971.



## DESCENT FROM THE CROSS C. 1934–35



Kathleen Munn, *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1934-35  
Ink on paper, 73.2 x 52.5 cm  
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa



This drawing is Munn's most accomplished rendition of Christ's Descent from the Cross, a subject she explored several times, as in her early monoprint *Untitled (Descent from the Cross)*, c. 1927.

Here Munn's brilliance is revealed in the way she creates a highly unconventional and original image without abandoning traditional narrative. The sharp shards of the crystalline, cosmic landscape, along with the three crucifixes, appear to pin the composition to the paper. Christ's lifeless body is discernible in the centre of the cascading knots of figures, dynamically arranged diagonally from top left to bottom right. His body is distinct, singled out by a large ray of white light. In this fractured landscape Munn includes a thin crescent moon as a metaphoric reference.

Powerful and dynamic, *Descent from the Cross* is a striking image of both pathos and ecstasy, fuelled by complementary contradictions. It reveals Munn's drawing virtuosity as well as her ability to integrate advanced modern aesthetics with conventional subject matter. This is her unique contribution to modern art.

Taking on this subject matter was a bold and definitive statement on Munn's part. With this work she declared her ambition to engage with the grand narrative of European art history alongside the great masters she knew and admired. Munn was surely familiar with one of the most revered works in European art: *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, painted by Rogier van der Weyden (1399–1464) five hundred years before.



Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, oil on oak panel, 220 x 262 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



## THE CRUCIFIXION (PASSION SERIES) C. 1934–35



Kathleen Munn, *The Crucifixion (Passion Series)*, c. 1934–35  
Pen and black ink over graphite on wove paper, 57 x 77.2 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Munn depicted the Crucifixion in paintings, drawings, and sketches more than any other Passion scene. This Crucifixion is one of the most ambitious and accomplished works from her Passion series—her large ink on paper drawings first exhibited publicly in Toronto in 1935 at the Malloney Galleries in *Exhibition of Drawings by Kathleen Munn, LeMoine FitzGerald, Bertram Brooker*. Graham McInnes, critic for *Saturday Night*, wrote in a review of the show: “In her Crucifixion series Miss Munn has built up through her feeling for composition, a series of drawings whose cumulative effect on one is almost awesome.”<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890–1956) in 1934, Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) described Munn’s Passion drawings as “simply stupendous.”<sup>2</sup>

The Crucifixion was selected by prints and drawing curator Rosemary Tovell for acquisition by the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in 1974, when she visited the artist in her home. Tovell recalls a small apartment filled with drawings, and a woman with a lovely sense of humour and a lively mind. Munn was eager to





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talk about her time in the 1920s with collectors Ruth and Harold Tovell (the curator's grandparents). She admired their collection of modern art and remembered feeling understood and supported in their company<sup>3</sup>. Energized by the curator's visit and the promised acquisition, after decades of obscurity, Munn wrote of her hope: "a possible future for my work."<sup>4</sup> Sadly, she did not live to see this happen. In October that year, before the sale was complete, she died, never knowing that her artistic achievements were soon to be recognized. The work was eventually purchased by the NGC in 1995.



## LAST SUPPER 1938



Kathleen Munn, *Last Supper*, 1938  
Graphite on paper, 38.7 x 49.5 cm  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Munn achieves a new level of simplicity and cohesiveness in this beautifully conceived drawing of the Last Supper. Slightly off-centre, the action is contained in a Gothic quatrefoil, indicating the medieval roots of her inspiration.

Twelve apostles are braided together, alluding to the crown of thorns, which also resonates in Christ's halo. This is the only time Munn includes this specific religious reference. Christ is the one figure standing, looking up, anticipating his resurrection. Munn's ability to bring together all the key elements of the Passion of Christ in one image is a formidable accomplishment of modern visual expression.





Among Munn's most refined and elegant Passion drawings, *Last Supper* is one of two works Munn sold to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario) in 1945. Only three of her works entered public collections during her lifetime. Regarding this acquisition, she requested that the gallery "select from a few of those [drawings] that I might care to be represented by."<sup>1</sup>



An abstract geometric drawing in brown ink on a light beige background. The drawing consists of numerous overlapping, irregular lines and shapes, creating a complex, layered effect. The lines vary in thickness and orientation, forming a dense, web-like structure that fills most of the upper half of the image. The overall impression is one of dynamic movement and intricate detail.

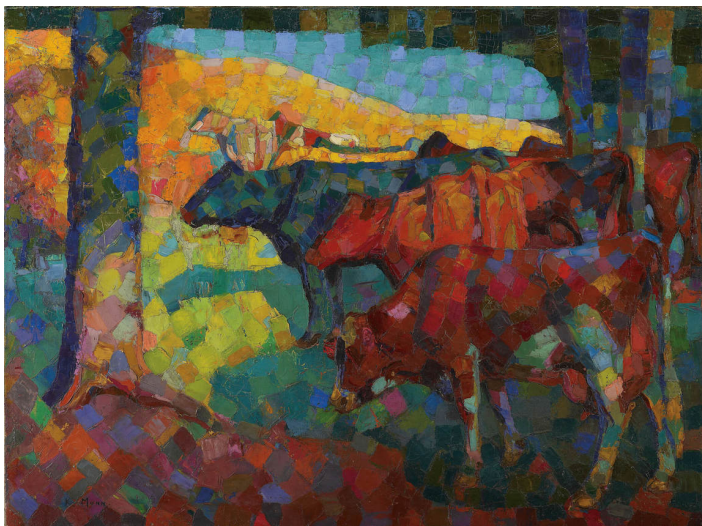
# **SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES**

The work of Kathleen Munn broadens our understanding of the modern art movement in Canada. As her contemporary Bertram Brooker explained, she distilled “the most modern and the most ancient art” into a stunning expression entirely her own. Munn is notable for experimenting with abstract art earlier than most other artists in Canada; her studies and wide-ranging explorations contribute to her originality.



## SIGNIFICANCE

Kathleen Munn was among the few early twentieth-century Canadian artists to experiment with modern art techniques and styles, such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Synchronism. During the 1910s and 1920s Munn developed her signature use of bold colours to paint traditional subject matter in works such as *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916, and *The Dance*, c. 1923. Munn was also one of the first Canadian painters to create abstract compositions, including *Untitled I* and *Untitled II*, c. 1926–28, though she did not exhibit them.



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916, oil on canvas, 76.3 x 101.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

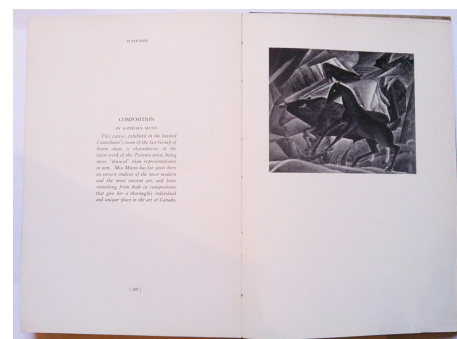


Kathleen Munn, *Untitled II*, c. 1926–28, oil on canvas, 38 x 44.3 cm, Collection Lavalin, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

In the 1930s, after close study of the theory of dynamic symmetry, developed by Jay Hambidge (1867–1924), a significant shift took place in Munn's art with her *Passion* series. In these works she radicalized the academic tradition of the human figure by reimagining its expressive and conceptual potential.

Munn's work leads us to a deeper understanding of the development of modern art in Canada and of how artists responded to contemporary ideas that were in play in the international art world at a time when very little avant-garde art was being shown domestically. Munn shaped her own vision rather than follow the direction promoted by the national art movement represented by the Group of Seven.

Munn's dynamic and colourful paintings—such as *The Dance*—were exhibited alongside the work of her Canadian contemporaries, where they were seen as baffling and out of place. Art critic Newton MacTavish's description of her work in 1925 is typical: "Perhaps she is too far advanced for the average conception, for some of her best work is in danger of being misunderstood."<sup>1</sup>



Kathleen Munn was featured in *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*, 1928–1929, edited by Bertram Brooker.



Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) was among the first to understand and articulate Munn’s unique modernism. In his *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928–1929*, he singled her out for being committed to both “the most modern and the most ancient art” and reproduced her painting *Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927. Munn believed in the contemporary relevance of historical expression and understood historical art as the ancestry of modernity. She was determined to realize a new expression with ancient roots that would stand out as her own.

### CRITICAL ISSUES

In Munn’s ten known large ink and graphite drawings inspired by the Passion and Resurrection of Christ—including *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1934–35, and *Last Supper*, 1938—she brought together her dual interest in modern art and canonical themes. In European art Christ’s story represents the transformation of matter into spirit, object into idea. Jay Hambidge’s writings on dynamic symmetry offered Munn a theoretical and practical framework through which she could explore the relationship between object (what we know) and idea (what we seek).



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Deposition)*, c. 1926–28, oil on canvas, 41.2 x 55.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Ideas of beauty are central to Munn’s work. As she noted, “Perfect beauty is the expression of perfect order, balance, harmony, rhythm. Beauty is a supreme instance of order intuitively felt, instinctively appreciated.”<sup>2</sup> When Munn wrote in her notebook, in the 1920s, “I am going to do something next year so massive in construction and so simple that it will stand out against everything,” she declared her commitment to a grand project of classic proportions; her interest was not in the immediate or specific, rather it was in the timeless and universal. Although she stated in 1924 that “no one artist can represent all the beauty of life,” she was determined to attempt just that.

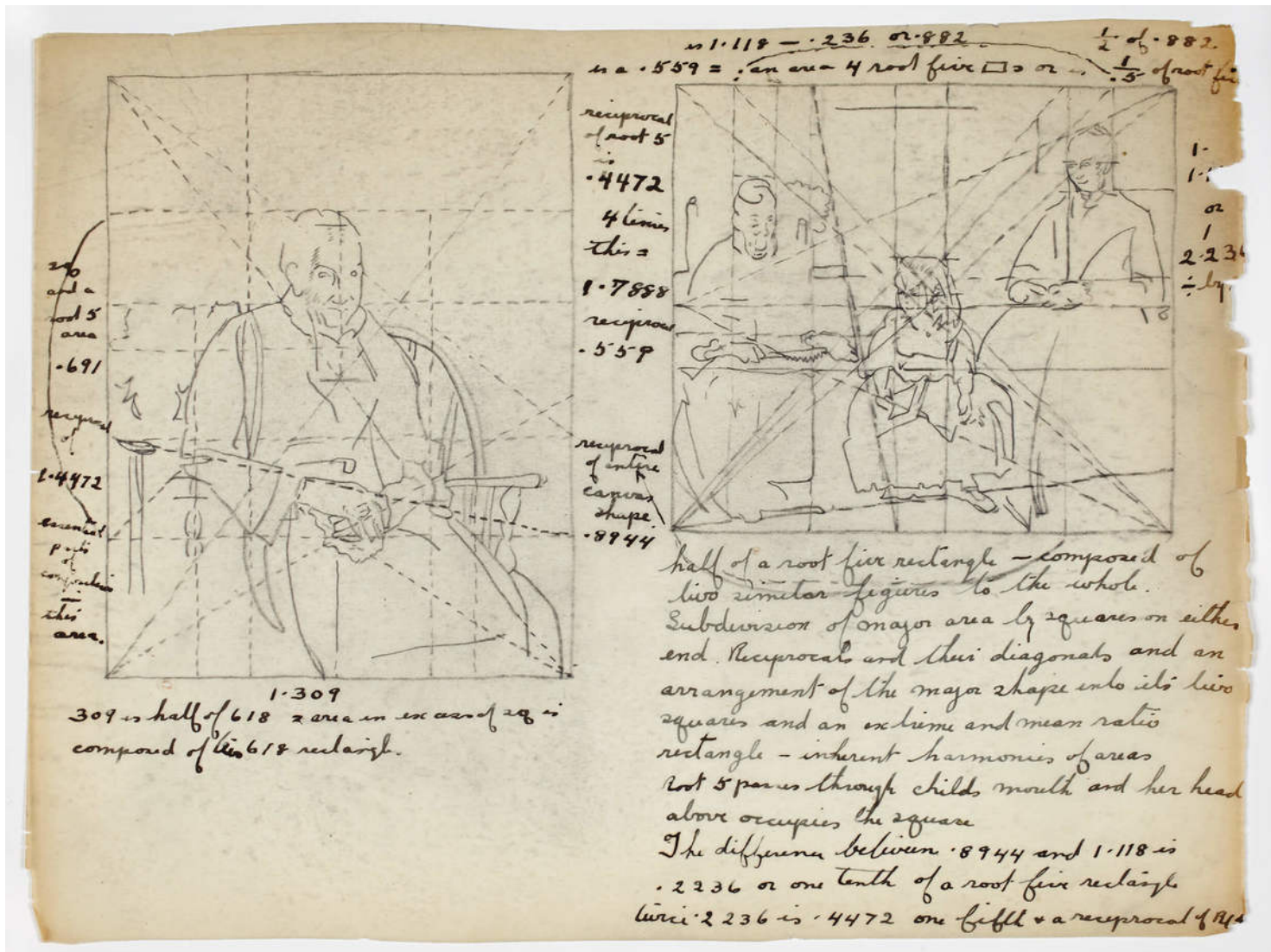
From the late 1920s Munn worked exclusively, and intensely, on Passion scenes. She understood that her attempt to “represent all the beauty of life” required abandonment to achieve a breakthrough. Her Passion-themed painting *Untitled (Deposition)*, c. 1926–28, is evidence of this, as it appears to be a trial and exploration rather than a finished work. The relationship between the Passion drawings and paintings remains a rich area for future investigation.

Since the late 1980s, research, exhibitions, and writings have begun to address Munn’s contribution to art in Canada. The work of Kathleen Munn compels us to examine how the history of art is written and how an individual artist engages with modernism.



## THEORY

While Munn never explicitly wrote about Hambidge, it is clear from her decade-long experimentation with his theories that his essays confirmed for her the primacy of the human form and suggested a methodology for its representation. However, her interpretation and application of his theories are wholly original.



Kathleen Munn's notes on Jay Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry.



In the introduction to his "Lessons" from 1919, Jay Hambidge argues for the development of modern art rooted in classical principles. "The basic principles underlying the greatest art so far produced in the world may be found in the proportions of the human figure and in the growing plant," he writes. "The dynamic is a symmetry suggestive of life and movement," and the "symmetry of man" is one of the key sources for its study.<sup>33</sup> Echoing these words, Munn stated how she sought to achieve in her work "something inevitable found in composing, like nature, like the universe—space rhythm harmony—creating a mathematical feeling."<sup>4</sup>

Hambidge offered explicit mathematical instructions and diagrams demonstrating the principles of dynamic symmetry as derived from nature and Greek art. His concept of the "rectangle of the whirling squares"—numerically expressed as 1.618 and commonly referred to as the "golden ratio"—was most important to Munn. It is at the core of dynamic symmetry and proportion. In 1923 Hambidge lauded the use of dynamic symmetry by American artists—George Bellows (1882–1925), specifically—and declared that "much of the weakness of modern art is due to too much sex, too much sentiment, and too little design."<sup>5</sup> Munn copied and underlined this passage in her notebook. She produced over one thousand drawings of the human figure based on the principles of the whirling square.

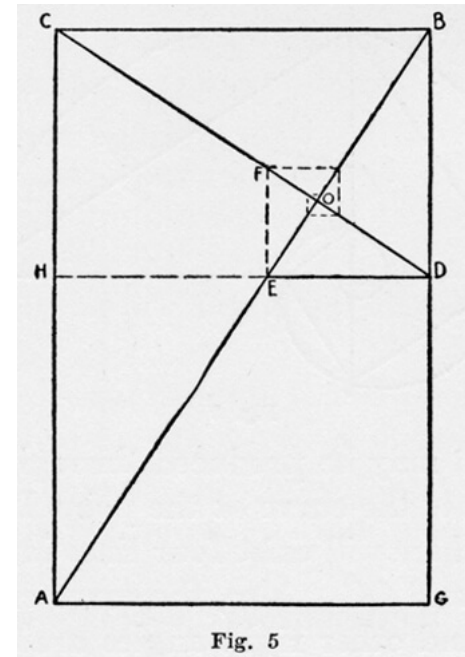


Illustration of the whirling square from *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* by Jay Hambidge, 1926.



The background of the page is a cubist painting by Kathleen Munn. It depicts a horse in profile, facing left, with a dark brown head and neck and a lighter, golden-brown body. The horse is standing on a green, grassy slope. In the background, there are various geometric shapes and colors, including red, yellow, and green, suggesting a stylized landscape. The painting is characterized by bold lines and a rich, textured surface.

# STYLE & TECHNIQUE

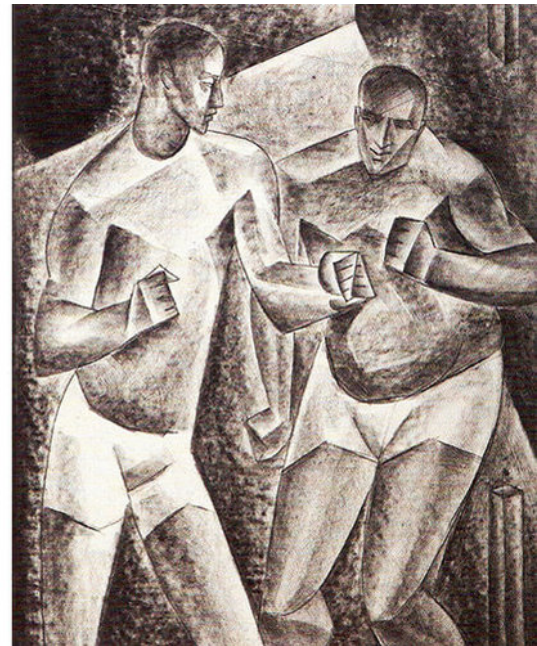
Seeking inspiration beyond the conservative art scene in Toronto, Kathleen Munn absorbed the lessons of the international modern art movement in New York and Europe to create her signature paintings in the 1920s. In the 1930s she devised her own unique drawing technique to achieve a new visual vocabulary.



## NEW YORK MODERNISM

Munn absorbed the lessons of the Ashcan School artists George Bellows (1882–1925) and Robert Henri (1865–1929) when she attended the Art Students League (ASL) in New York in 1912. Her art was profoundly influenced by her studies in New York and by her visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1912 and 1928.

Munn's early paintings are characterized by broad brush strokes and dark tones capturing the personality and expression of the subject. The *Globe* critic praised her "boldness of execution" and unique imagination in the paintings she exhibited upon her return to Toronto.<sup>1</sup> Munn's "study of a woman's head is strikingly individual.... The artist conveys the impression of an unusual personality," wrote a reviewer in the *Star* in April 1913.<sup>2</sup>



LEFT: George Bellows, *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, oil on canvas, 115 x 160.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
RIGHT: Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Boxers)*, c. 1925, charcoal and graphite on paper, 32 x 26 cm, private collection.

Munn's style changed dramatically in the 1920s, though she continued to be inspired by George Bellows. Around 1925, the year of his memorial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, she drew and painted a pair of boxers. These works reference Bellows's *Both Members of This Club*, 1909, which was centrally installed in the retrospective.

## AMERICAN CUBISM

In the early 1910s Munn studied at the ASL summer school in Woodstock, New York, with American artists Andrew Dasburg (1887–1979) and Max Weber (1881–1961), both greatly influenced by Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Cubism. She was awarded a first prize in Woodstock in 1914.

Munn read widely and attended lectures on a variety of topics: the history of art and design, art theory, literature, philosophy, mythology, and music, among others. She recorded her studies from this time in her Notebook 1, for future reference. Among the texts she read were *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* by Willard Huntington Wright, and "The Ancestry of Cubism" by Jay Hambidge (1867–1924) and Gove Hambidge.





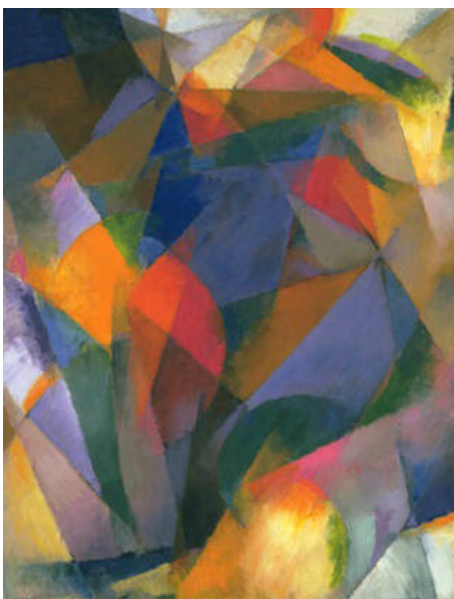
Munn in the Catskills, c. 1928.

### SYNCHROMISM

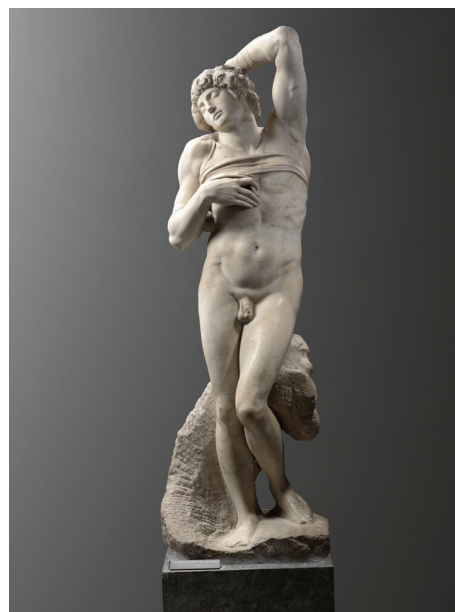
During the 1910s and 1920s Munn's work was dominated by the Synchronists' use of colour to define form. She studied *The Creative Will: Studies in the Philosophy and Syntax of Aesthetics* by Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973), published in 1916, and knew his work and that of fellow American and French Synchronists: Morgan Russell (1886-1953), Robert Delaunay (1885-1941) and Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979), and Andrew Dasburg, her teacher.

These artists spoke of colour rhythms, masses, contrasts, directions, and continuity. Colour, above all, was central to her painting. Munn wrote in her notebook that "painting is little more than a transcription of sense impression and of accent of vision, light, dark, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet; up, down, right, left, straight, round, large, small and so on."<sup>3</sup>

The Synchronists also asserted the primary importance of the human body. Brothers Willard Huntington Wright and Stanton Macdonald-Wright had a devoted interest in sculpture and the rhythms of the human form—they were highly influenced by the sculptures *Slaves* by Michelangelo (1475-1564), begun in 1513. These works also link to Munn's figures in the Passion series, which feature contorted



Stanton Macdonald-Wright, *Synchrony*, 1917, oil on canvas, 78.8 x 61 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Michelangelo, *The Dying Slave*, c. 1513-15, marble, H 2.28 m, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



human figures.

## ABSTRACTION

In 1927 a landmark event took place in Toronto: the *International Exhibition of Modern Art* was brought to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario). Arranged by the Société Anonyme (an art organization co-founded by Katherine Dreier), this large exhibition included major works by Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Franz Marc (1880–1916), and Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), among many others, and was the Canadian public's introduction to international modernism and abstraction.<sup>4</sup> Tours and lectures were organized to promote the importance of modern art, and Kathleen Munn is believed to have given a talk at the exhibition.



Franz Marc, *The Dream*, 1912, oil on canvas, 100.5 x 135.5 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled I*, c. 1926–28, oil on canvas, 37 x 60 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

It was at this time that Munn began to experiment with pure abstraction, though it was a brief foray. *Untitled I* and *Untitled II*, both c. 1926–28, are abstracted land forms expressed in bold colours; rhythm and movement through space are the artist's key concerns. As with the works of Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) and Lawren Harris (1885–1970), Munn's abstract painting was in part inspired by the theosophical writings of Helena Blavatsky and the notion of the fourth dimension developed by P.D. Ouspensky. Munn's Notebook 4 records her reading of these and related texts.

It is unlikely that Munn ever exhibited her abstract works—after her death the canvases were found rolled up and stored. However, these abstracted forms feature prominently in Munn's mature paintings from the mid- to late 1920s, such as *Composition (Reclining Nude)*; *Untitled (Deposition)*; and *Untitled (Ascension)*, in the York University Collection, Toronto; and in many of her drawings of figures in landscape.

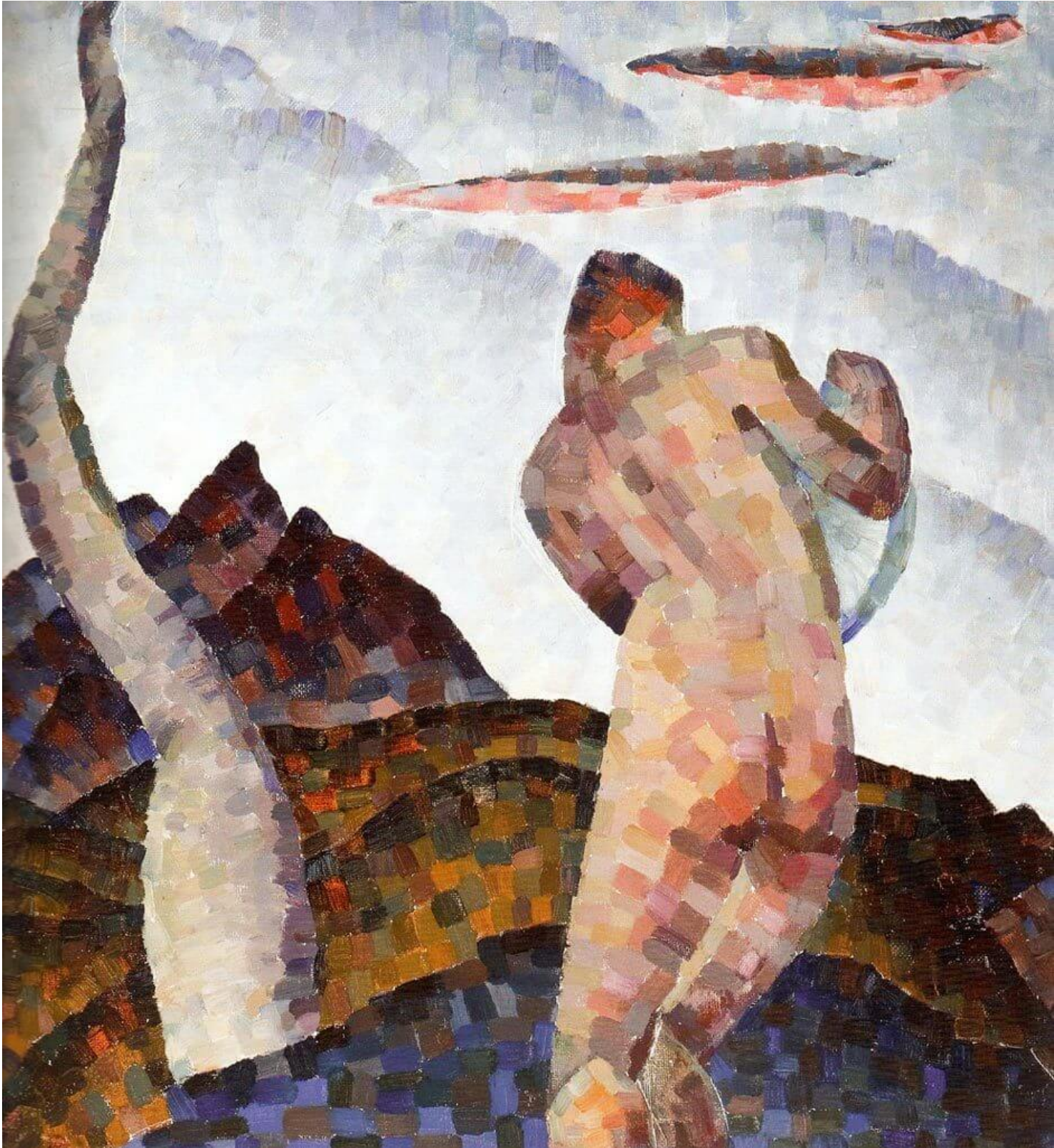


Kathleen Munn's paintbox, with compass set at top right.



### THE FIGURE IN LANDSCAPE

Throughout her career Kathleen Munn was first and foremost a dedicated student of the human figure. The 1920s was a decade of great experimentation and learning for Munn, one that led to an eloquent flourishing in a number of related pictorial styles and to her reimagining the conceptual potential of the human figure.



Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Figure in a Landscape)*, c. 1928-30, oil on canvas, 51.9 x 50.6 cm, private collection.

As the art historian Anna Hudson asserts, "Munn saw the body as a complex aesthetic instrument, richest in its discordant tension of representational and abstract readings. As such, she recognized the transgressive power of the nude as a subject of modern art."<sup>5</sup> Although she drew the human form from live



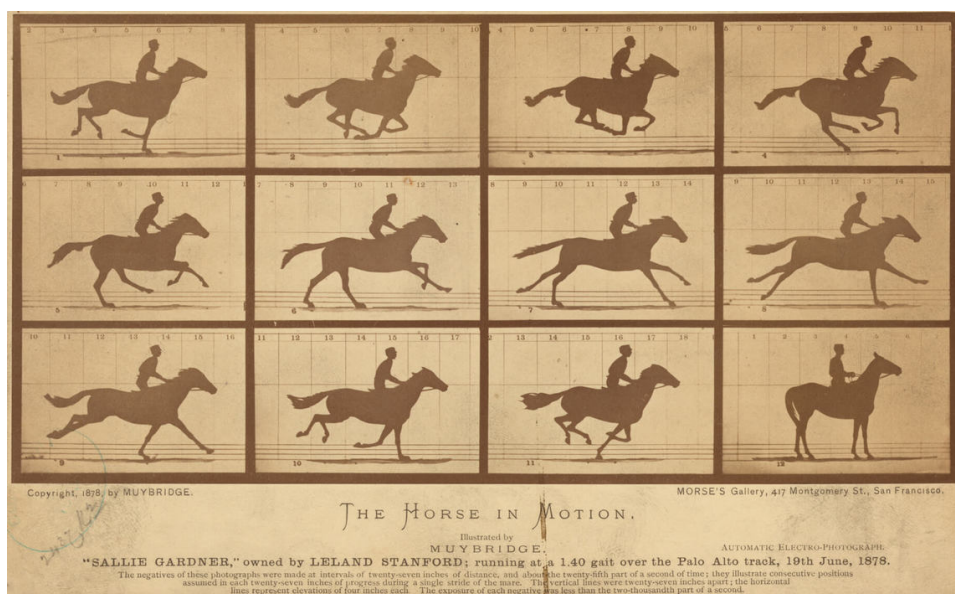
studio models, Munn also studied the figure as an idealized form—as created by ancient Greek sculptors, reimagined by the Renaissance masters, and reinterpreted by Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) and Brancusi, by way of El Greco (c. 1541–1614), George Bellows, and Henri Matisse (1869–1954).

Munn’s take on the classical subject of “the bathers” is entirely her own. With it she explores the way a single figure resonates with the natural features, as in *Untitled (Figure in a Landscape)*, c. 1928–30, where the form of a standing nude echoes the curves of a solitary tree. Most often Munn is interested in a group of figures interacting in space, as in *Untitled (Four Figures in the Woods)*, c. 1928–30. These paintings are about composition and rhythm. Munn also incorporated geometric principles here, and she refined her use of colour.

### A METHOD OF HER OWN

Until the early 1930s Munn’s drawings were studies and sketches for her paintings. With the *Passion* series, however, her methodology changed, and drawing became her primary practice. Black ink and graphite now superseded the centrality of colour for Munn. First exhibited in 1935 and now known as the *Passion* series, these works are the culmination of a long, meticulous process of experimentation.

Munn’s papers include diagrams in which she developed Jay Hambidge’s concept of the “whirling square” into a cube using a compass. She translated the whirling square into an expression of three-dimensionality so that she could apply it to her theory of how to draw the human form in motion. Munn was also aware of the photographic studies of Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), of animals and humans in motion; she made numerous sketches recording how a body twists and noting proportional differences between male and female bodies. Her drawings included annotations, such as “first lay out pose of head on neck and planted firmly on its feet” and “use pit of neck as pivot.”



Eadweard Muybridge, *The Horse in Motion: “Sallie Gardner,” Owned by Leland Stanford*, c. 1878, photographic print on card, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.





Kathleen Munn, working drawing for the Passion series, "Crucified Figure," c. 1927-38 (left to right: recto; verso; recto & verso combined, as seen through the light box), graphite on paper, 25.7 x 18.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Ultimately Munn devised a unique technique to build a figure and express its countless positions and views in space. She created a template for each key position, each having origins in the whirling square but now reconfigured into a system used to generate movements in a human figure. Bodies twist, are foreshortened, reach upward, fall, bend, or kneel. Munn reduced the contorted and moving figures to schematics, even using a numbered system to identify unique templates that refer to specific poses and actions.

### MUNN'S LIGHT BOX

In the late 1920s or early 1930s Munn's nephew William Richards constructed a light box to her specifications. It was rediscovered in 2010 and led to a deeper understanding of Munn's innovative drawing process and technique for the over one thousand preparatory drawings for the Passion series.

The light box was fundamental to her method of building a figure and expressing its countless positions and views in space. Using small- or medium-sized sheets of thin typewriter paper, Munn transferred a specific schematic template from sheet to sheet and then drew multiple legs or arms in various positions on both sides of the paper. This process enabled almost endless permutations of the figure in motion.

Munn would then make notes on the sheet: "head falling down," "get arm on left," or "try this for erecting figure on cross." She also indicated figures for use in depicting certain episodes of the Passion—such as Deposition, Mount of Olives, and Ascension, among others. Munn sketched the interaction of multiple figures in hundreds of drawings, producing sets of crowds, which she then collaged. The single-figure drawings have numbers in the corner, referencing a system (possibly of her own invention) yet to be decoded. Rarely dated and never signed, some of these study drawings are found in private collections in Canada.



Munn's light box, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.





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Munn's meticulous experimentation led to the creation of the large finished drawings, including *Crucifixion (Passion Series)*, c. 1934-35, *Untitled (Descent from the Cross)*, c. 1927, and *Last Supper*, 1938. The reviewer G. Campbell McInnes lauded this series in 1935 for its "cumulative effect on one as almost awesome."<sup>6</sup> Munn's close friend and fellow artist Bertram Brooker called the works "simply stupendous."<sup>7</sup> These drawings reveal the intensity and resoluteness of her project as well as her relentless perseverance and single-mindedness. They also give us an intimate understanding of her working method—a deep and irresistible passion.





The Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery have by far the largest holdings of works by Kathleen Munn, but her work can be found in public and private collections across Canada. Although the works listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.





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## ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

2 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada  
780-422-6223  
youraga.ca



**Kathleen Munn, *Still Life*, c. 1925**  
Oil on canvas  
54.5 x 44.3 cm

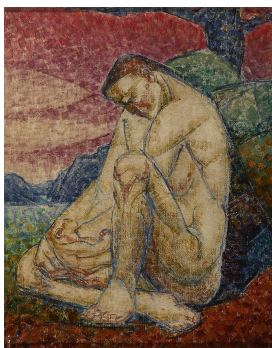


**Kathleen Munn, *Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927**  
Oil on canvas  
51 x 60.7 cm

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## ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

123 King Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
905-527-6610  
artgalleryofhamilton.com



**Kathleen Munn, *Mother and Child*, c. 1930**  
Oil on canvas laid down  
on paperboard  
26.1 x 20.5 cm

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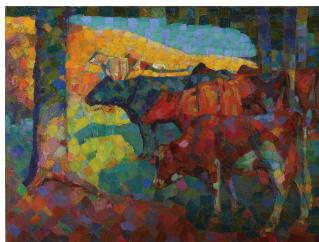
# KATHLEEN MUNN

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## ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648  
ago.net



**Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916**

Oil on canvas  
76.3 x 101.7 cm



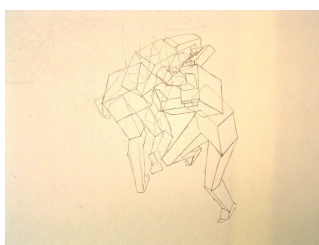
**Kathleen Munn, *Last Supper*, 1938**

Graphite on paper  
38.7 x 49.5 cm

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## ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, E.P. TAYLOR RESEARCH LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

317 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648  
ago.net/research-library-archives



**Kathleen Munn, working drawing for the *Passion* series, c. 1927-38**

Graphite on paper



**Kathleen Munn, working drawing for the *Passion* series, "Crucified Figure," c. 1927-38**

Graphite on paper  
25.7 x 18.7 cm



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## MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

185 Sainte-Catherine Street West  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
514-847-6226  
[macm.org/en](http://macm.org/en)



**Kathleen Munn, *Untitled II*, c. 1926-28**  
Oil on canvas  
38 x 44.3 cm

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## NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
613-990-1985  
[gallery.ca](http://gallery.ca)



**Kathleen Munn, *The Crucifixion (Passion Series)*, c. 1934-35**  
Pen and black ink over  
graphite on wove  
paper  
57 x 77.2 cm



**Kathleen Munn, *Untitled I*, c. 1926-28**  
Oil on canvas  
37 x 60 cm



**Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Deposition)*, c. 1926-28**  
Oil on canvas  
41.2 x 55.6 cm

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## ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN GALLERY

72 Queen Street  
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada  
905-576-3000  
rmg.on.ca



**Kathleen Munn, *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1934-35**

Ink on paper  
73.2 x 52.5 cm

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## NOTES

### BIOGRAPHY

1. Kathleen Munn, draft letter to Charles Hill, likely April 1974. Munn was inquiring about a follow-up visit with Rosemary Tovell. The letter was apparently never mailed, possibly because Tovell did contact Munn soon after. Munn family papers, Toronto.

2. Kathleen Munn, notes on an envelope dated May 28, 1974. Munn family papers, Toronto.

### KEY WORKS: THE DANCE

1. Kathleen Munn, Notebook 6, c. 1924, unpaginated. Kathleen Munn fonds, SC105, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

2. *Mail and Empire* (Toronto), December 26, 1923, 5.

3. Newton MacTavish, *The Fine Arts in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1925), 144.

### KEY WORKS: COMPOSITION (HORSES)

1. Bertram Brooker, "Composition by Kathleen Munn," in *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928-1929* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), 268.

### KEY WORKS: THE CRUCIFIXION (PASSION SERIES)

1. Graham McInnes, "The World of Art," *Saturday Night*, May 25, 1935, 11.

2. Bertram Brooker, letter to Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, dated 1934. This letter is likely in Bertram Brooker's archives, held at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, but the reference here is from Joyce Zemans, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter, *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1988), 12.

3. Author telephone interview with Rosemary Tovell, January 6, 2010.

4. Kathleen Munn, notes on an envelope dated May 28, 1974. Munn family papers, Toronto

### KEY WORKS: LAST SUPPER

1. Kathleen Munn, letter to Martin Baldwin, [May] 14, 1945. Accession file 2797, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

### SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Newton MacTavish, *The Fine Arts in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1925), 144.

2. All the quotes in this paragraph are from Kathleen Munn's various notebooks (unpaginated) from the 1920s. Kathleen Munn fonds, SC105, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

3. Jay Hambidge, *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* (New York: Brentano's, 1926), xiii.



4. Munn, letter to Charles Hill, March 1, 1974, Kathleen Munn file, Canadian Art Box 1, National Gallery of Canada fonds, National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa.

5. Jay Hambidge, *Dynamic Symmetry in Composition as Used by the Artists* (New York: Brentano's, 1923), 83.

### STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. *Globe* (Toronto), April 5, 1913, 10.

2. *Star* (Toronto), April 5, 1913.

3. Kathleen Munn, Notebook 1, 1910s, unpaginated. Kathleen Munn fonds, SC105, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

4. See Roald Nasgaard, *Abstract Painting in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007); and Ruth L. Bohan, *The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

5. Anna Hudson, "Disarming Conventions of Nudity in Canadian Art," in Michèle Grandbois, Anna Hudson, and Esther Trépanier, *The Nude in Modern Canadian Art, 1920-1950* (Quebec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2009), 106.

6. Graham Campbell McInnes, "The World of Art," *Saturday Night*, May 25, 1935, 11.

7. Bertram Brooker, letter to Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald, dated 1934. This letter is likely in Bertram Brooker's archives, held at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, but the reference here is from Joyce Zemans, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter, *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1988), 12.





### GLOSSARY

#### **Ancestry of Cubism, The**

An article written by Jay Hambidge and Gove Hambidge, published in *Century Magazine* in 1914. The authors refer to examples of antique art and also to more recent art and design that they believed were precedents for Cubism and argue that the method of blocking out was not new.

#### **Archipenko, Alexander (Russian/American, 1887–1964)**

A highly influential Cubist sculptor, introduced to the movement by Fernand Léger after moving from Moscow to Paris in 1908. Archipenko's early work expresses the materiality of and contrast between positive and negative space; like Pablo Picasso, he created sculptural assemblages of found materials.

#### **Art Students League of New York**

A progressive art school established by artists for artists in 1875. By the turn of the twentieth century the Art Students League was attracting many students who would become central figures in contemporary American art. Teachers included William Merritt Chase, Thomas Eakins, and Robert Henri.

#### **Ashcan School**

A group of New York-based American painters—principally George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, Edward Hopper, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and John French Sloan—active from around 1908 to the First World War, interested in depicting scenes of daily urban life, including slum life and marginalized populations.

#### **Bellows, George (American, 1882–1925)**

A painter and lithographer, famed student of Robert Henri, and co-organizer of the Armory Show. Bellows's varied and prolific career—he quickly moved from portraits of child labourers to scenes of illegal boxing matches to seascapes—was cut short by his death from a ruptured appendix.

#### **Blake, William (British, 1757–1827)**

A poet, visual artist, and mystical philosopher, considered a seminal figure of the Romantic period. Deeply religious and unconventional, Blake was fervently anti-rationalist and anti-materialist. Among his small circle of admirers were the Ancients (a group of English artists) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

#### **Blaue Reiter**

Formed in 1911, a collective of artists of disparate styles and concerns—including Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, August Macke, and Franz Marc—regarded as representing the apex of German Expressionism. The group had only two exhibitions before disbanding with the onset of the First World War.

#### **Blavatsky, Helena (Russian, 1831–1891)**

A spiritualist and the prolific author of books on ancient wisdom traditions, the occult, and esoteric religions, Madame Blavatsky was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875.



### **Brancusi, Constantin (Romanian, 1876–1957)**

An abstract sculptor, whose unique focus on expressing natural forms as simply as possible influenced later sculptors, including Amedeo Modigliani and Carl Andre. Active for most of his life in Paris, Brancusi became known in America following his inclusion in the Armory Show, the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art.

### **Brooker, Bertram (Canadian, 1888–1955)**

A British-born painter, illustrator, musician, poet, Governor General's Award-winning novelist, and Toronto advertising executive. In 1927 Brooker became the first Canadian artist to exhibit abstract art. His work is in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and other major collections.

### **Canadian National Exhibition (CNE)**

An annual fair held in Toronto, founded as the Toronto Industrial Exhibition in 1879. The CNE produced art exhibitions and catalogues annually until 1961, except during and immediately following the Second World War.

### **Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)**

A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including portraits of his wife, still lifes, and Provençal landscapes.

### **Cubism**

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

### **Dasburg, Andrew (American, 1887–1979)**

A modernist painter who was influenced by Paul Cézanne and Cubism. Dasburg taught Kathleen Munn when she attended the Art Students League summer school in Woodstock, New York.

### **Degas, Edgar (French, 1834–1917)**

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, and draftsman, aligned with but separate from the Impressionist movement, frequently departing from its norms: Degas was not interested in changing atmospheric effects and rarely painted outdoors. Characteristic subjects include the ballet, theatre, cafés, and women at their toilette.

### **Delaunay, Robert (French, 1885–1941)**

The first truly abstract painter in France. Delaunay's interest in colour theory—including how colours interact and relate to music and movement—is manifest in almost all of his work. Dubbed Orphism by Guillaume Apollinaire, his style influenced numerous artists and artistic movements, including German Expressionism, Futurism, and Synchronism.





### **Delaunay, Sonia (Russian, 1885–1979)**

A painter and textile designer, Sonia Delaunay was married to Robert Delaunay, with whom she developed Orphism. A leader in the fashion industry during the 1920s, she returned to painting after the collapse of her design business during the Depression. In the 1930s she was associated with the Abstraction-Création group.

### **Dreier, Katherine (American, 1877–1952)**

A painter, collector, patron, and—following her exposure to the European avant-garde with the 1913 Armory Show—a fierce promoter of modern art in the United States. To champion this cause, Dreier co-founded the Société Anonyme with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray in 1920.

### **dynamic symmetry**

A design theory developed by Jay Hambidge, which had a profound influence on both abstract and representational painters during the 1920s and 1930s. Dynamic symmetry is a proportioning system, whereby mathematical formulas are the foundation of the proportion and symmetry of classical architecture and various natural structures.

### **El Greco (Greek, c. 1541–1614)**

Painter, sculptor, and architect considered the first master of the Spanish School. Born Doménikos Theotokópoulos in Crete, El Greco settled in Toledo, Spain, in 1576, where he executed major commissions throughout his career, including the prized altarpieces *Espolio*, 1577–79, and *Burial of Count Orgaz*, 1586–88.

### **FitzGerald, Lionel LeMoine (Canadian, 1890–1956)**

A Winnipeg-born painter and printmaker, FitzGerald was a member of the Group of Seven from 1932 to 1933. He favoured depictions of prairie landscapes and houses, which he executed in pointillist, precisionist, and abstract styles. (See *Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald: Life & Work* by Michael-Parke Taylor.)

### **Group of Seven**

A progressive and nationalistic school of landscape painting in Canada, active between 1920 (the year of the group's first exhibition, at the Art Gallery of Toronto, now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and 1933. Founding members were the artists Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley.

### **Hambidge, Jay (Canadian/American, 1867–1924)**

A Canadian-born artist, mathematician, and student of classical art, Hambidge was a pupil of William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League of New York. He is best known for conceiving and promulgating the principles of "dynamic symmetry," a design theory in which mathematical formulas are the foundation of classical architecture and various natural structures. Dynamic symmetry had a profound influence on both abstract and representational painters during the 1920s and 1930s.

**Harris, Lawren (Canadian, 1885–1970)**

A founding member of the Group of Seven in Toronto in 1920, Harris was widely considered its unofficial leader. His landscape-painting style, unlike that of the other members of the Group, evolved into pure abstraction. The Group of Seven broke up in 1933, and when the Canadian Group of Painters was formed in 1933, Harris was elected its first president.

**Henri, Robert (American, 1865–1929)**

A painter, writer, and teacher known primarily for his influence on the development of twentieth-century American art. A leading figure of the Ashcan School, Henri championed daily urban life as subject matter for art. He taught in New York for more than twenty-five years.

**Housser, Frederick (Canadian, 1889–1936)**

A writer, financial editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, and art critic, who wrote the first book on the Group of Seven, in 1926. *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* was highly influential and hotly contested at the time of its publication. He was a good friend of the artists, a fellow theosophist, and, with his first wife, Bess (an artist who later married Lawren Harris), an early private collector of the group's work. He died soon after his second marriage, to Yvonne McKague Housser.

**Housser, Yvonne McKague (Canadian, 1897–1996)**

A painter associated with the Group of Seven, Housser was an art teacher and later a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters and the Federation of Canadian Artists. She studied painting in Paris in the early 1920s, and in Cape Cod in the 1950s with the Abstract Expressionist Hans Hofmann.

**Kandinsky, Wassily (Russian, 1866–1944)**

An artist, teacher, and philosopher who settled in Germany and later in France, Kandinsky was central to the development of abstract art. Much of his work conveys his interest in the relationships between colour, sound, and emotion. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), his famous treatise on abstraction, draws on mysticism and theories of divinity.

**Knowles, Farquhar McGillivray (Canadian, 1859–1932)**

Born in Syracuse, New York, Knowles became a noted Toronto painter, active in the city from the 1880s to 1920. He became a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA) in 1898. His work is in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and other major collections in Canada.

**Last Supper**

According to Christian belief, the final meal that Jesus shared with his apostles before his crucifixion. The Last Supper is a popular subject in Christian religious and folk art.





### **Macdonald-Wright, Stanton (American, 1890–1973)**

One of the first American abstract artists. He and Morgan Russell developed Synchromism while the two were living in Paris. Macdonald-Wright had a profound interest in East Asian art and lived in a monastery in Japan toward the end of his life.

### **Marc, Franz (German, 1880–1916)**

A founder of Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider), an association of German Expressionist artists, Marc was a painter and printmaker. His work, which features animals as embodiments of mystical energy, became increasingly abstract. He was killed in combat in the First World War.

### **Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)**

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

### **Michelangelo (Italian, 1475–1564)**

A sculptor, painter, architect, engineer, and poet during the High Renaissance, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni was renowned during his lifetime and is considered one of the greatest artists in history. His best-known works include the sculptures *David*, 1501–04, and *Pietà*, 1498–99, the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, and his design for the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

### **monoprint**

A printmaking technique invented by Giovanni Castiglione around 1640 and revived in the late nineteenth century by, most notably, Paul Gauguin and Edgar Degas. A monoprint is produced by printing from a plate that is inked but otherwise untouched; the process typically yields only one good impression.

### **Muybridge, Eadweard (British, 1830–1904)**

A landscape and experimental photographer best known for his groundbreaking motion studies. From 1872—when he famously photographed the gait of Leland Stanford's horse—to the 1890s, Muybridge made thousands of photographs capturing the movements of animals and humans; some 20,000 were included in the portfolio *Animal Locomotion* (1887).

### **Ontario Society of Artists (OSA)**

Canada's oldest extant professional artists' association, formed in 1872 by seven artists from various disciplines. Its first annual exhibition was held in 1873. The OSA eventually played an important role in the founding of OCAD University and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

### **Ouspensky, P.D. (Russian, 1878–1947)**

A mathematician and philosopher who was also an influential figure in London literary circles and the Russian avant garde during the 1920s and 1930s. Today Ouspensky is primarily associated with the mystic George Gurdjieff, whose ideas he helped spread through publications and lectures after their first meeting in 1915. His books were very influential among artists for their understanding of metaphysics.



### **Pach, Walter (American, 1883–1958)**

An author, critic, and artist who championed modern art. He organized the landmark International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show, in New York, Chicago, and Boston in 1913.

### **Passion of Christ**

The sufferings of Christ during his last days, including the Crucifixion. The Passion of Christ is a popular subject in Christian religious and folk art.

### **Post-Impressionism**

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.

### **Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA)**

An organization of professional artists and architects, modelled after national academies long present in Europe, such as the Royal Academy of Arts in the U.K. (founded in 1768) and the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris (founded in 1648). The RCA was founded in 1880 by the Ontario Society of Artists and the Art Association of Montreal.

### **Russell, Morgan (American, 1886–1953)**

A painter significant to the history of abstract art. In 1912, having left New York for Paris, he launched Synchronism with Stanton Macdonald-Wright. His painting *Synchromy in Orange*, 1913–14, was acclaimed by Parisian critics and is now held by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

### **Synchronism**

A movement in abstract art concerned with the use of colour, founded in 1912 in Paris by expatriate American artists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell. Like Orphism, its European counterpart, championed by Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Synchronism was short-lived but influential (notably on the American painter Thomas Hart Benton), ending with the First World War.

### **van der Weyden, Rogier (Netherlandish, 1399–1464)**

A painter of great influence and repute during his time, widely considered a genius of European art, but about whom little is now known. Van der Weyden is principally recognized for his religious artworks; *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, and the altarpiece *Last Judgment*, c. 1445–50, are among his masterpieces.

### **Weber, Max (American, 1881–1961)**

A Russian-born painter, sculptor, printmaker, and writer, trained as an artist in Paris. Weber's early admiration and adoption of European modernist movements—including Fauvism and Cubism—made him one of the most significant artists of the American avant-garde.





**Wright, Willard Huntington (American, 1888–1939)**

A respected art critic and the brother of Stanton Macdonald-Wright. His book *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (1915) and numerous articles helped to promote Synchromism. He later became a successful detective novelist under the pen name S.S. Van Dine.

# SOURCES & RESOURCES

Kathleen Munn's work received limited critical attention during her lifetime, despite her active exhibition record. Since the 1980s, groundbreaking scholarship has brought renewed attention to her pioneering work. Munn's archives played a critical role in her rediscovery and revealed her deep engagement with modern art.





## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Munn's selected exhibition history is divided into two sections: exhibitions organized during her lifetime, and those since 1988.

### Selected Exhibitions during Munn's Lifetime

<b>1923–24</b>	November 22, 1923–January 2, 1924, 45th Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Art Gallery of Toronto.
<b>1928–30</b>	February 11–28, 1928, and April 5–27, 1930, <i>Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by the Group of Seven</i> , Art Gallery of Toronto.
<b>1935</b>	May 18–June 1, 1935, <i>Exhibition of Drawings by Kathleen Munn, LeMoine FitzGerald, Bertram Brooker</i> , Malloney Galleries, Toronto.
<b>1946</b>	October 5–November 7, 1946, <i>Windsor Art Association Exhibition</i> , Willistead Art Gallery, Windsor.
<b>1949</b>	August 26–September 10, 1949, <i>Canadian National Exhibition</i> , Toronto.
<b>1954</b>	April 9–May 5, 1954, <i>Canadian Drawings</i> , Willistead Art Gallery, Windsor.

For the most complete published exhibition and review record, see Zemans, Joyce, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter. *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada*. Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1988, 52–54.

Also, for online access to some of Kathleen Munn's early exhibition history, search "Index to Art in Canada to 1930," hosted by the National Gallery of Canada Library & Archives; and "OSA Exhibition Catalogue Search," hosted by the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art.



Installation view of Munn exhibition in 2008, Art Gallery of Windsor.

### Selected Exhibitions since 1988

**1988–90** October 13–November 13, 1988, *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada*, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto. Curated by Joyce Zemans. Travelled to Art Gallery of Windsor, December 10, 1988–January 22, 1989; Concordia Art Gallery, Montreal, February 23–April 8, 1989; Edmonton Art Gallery, April 29–June 11, 1989; McIntosh Gallery, London, July 16–September 10, 1989; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, September 30–November 5, 1989; Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, January 4–February 11, 1990. Catalogue.

*Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada* is the posthumous exhibition that reintroduced Kathleen Munn and affirmed her place in the history of modern art in Canada. As a result of this touring exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, her work was soon sought after by important private and public collections across Canada.

**2008–12** December 13, 2008–February 15, 2009, *Kathleen Munn and Lowrie Warrener: The Logic of Nature, The Romance of Space*, Art Gallery of Windsor. Curated by Cassandra Getty. Travelled to Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, January 9–March 7, 2010; Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, January 22–May 1, 2011; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, September 30, 2011–January 8, 2012. Catalogue.

**2009–10** October 8, 2009–January 3, 2010, *The Nude in Modern Canadian Art, 1920–1950*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Curated by Michèle Grandbois and Anna Hudson. Travelled to Glenbow Museum, Calgary,



February 13–April 25, 2010; Winnipeg Art Gallery, June 18–August 22, 2010.  
Catalogue.

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**2011**

June 4–August 28, 2011, *The Passion of Kathleen Munn*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Curated by Cassandra Getty and Georgiana Uhlyarik. Catalogue.



Installation view of Passion series in 2011, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

**CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS**

Getty, Cassandra, ed. *The Logic of Nature, The Romance of Space: Elements of Canadian Modernist Painting*. Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 2010. Exhibition catalogue.

Grandbois, Michèle, Anna Hudson, and Esther Trépanier. *The Nude in Modern Canadian Art, 1920–1950*. Quebec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2009. Exhibition catalogue.

Zemans, Joyce. "A Tale of Three Women: The Visual Arts in Canada, a Current Accounting." *RACAR (Canadian Art Review)* 25, nos. 1–2 (1998): 103–22.

Zemans, Joyce, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter. *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada*. Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1988. Exhibition catalogue.

**ARCHIVES**



Kathleen Munn's archives are housed at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and are accessible by appointment.

Important secondary material on Munn is contained in Bertram Brooker's archives, held at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

### REFERENCES

Most surveys of twentieth-century Canadian art since the 1990s refer to the work of Kathleen Munn.

Murray, Joan. *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999.

Nasgaard, Roald. *Abstract Painting in Canada*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007.

Tippett, Maria. *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1993.

Whitelaw, Anne, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky, eds. *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010.

For links to scanned exhibition reviews as well as a selected bibliography, search the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative (CWAHI) database.

Additional early references can be found in the artist files at the libraries of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and at the CWAHI Documentation Centre at Concordia University, Montreal, as well as in these selected texts:

Bradfield, Helen Pepall. *Art Gallery of Ontario: The Canadian Collection*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

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Harper, J. Russell. *Painting in Canada: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Hughes, Margaret E. "A Guide to Canadian Painters." *Ontario Library Review*, August 1940.

MacDonald, Colin S. *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists*. Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1967-90.

MacTavish, Newton. *The Fine Arts in Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1925.

Robson, A.H. *Canadian Landscape Painters*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1932.

### FURTHER READING

Kathleen Munn read widely, on topics including art history, theory, and criticism. Her library included books in English, Italian, German, and French; several monographs on El Greco, Rembrandt, Ingres, Cézanne, Picasso, and Tintoretto; books on the Vatican and ancient art from Greece, Egypt, Byzantium, South America, Africa, India, and Asia; and a book on the anatomy of the cow.

The following publications were formative for Munn and thus offer context to understanding her work:

Cheney, Sheldon. *A Primer of Modern Art*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924.

Fry, Roger. *Vision and Design*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1920.





Hambidge, Jay. *Dynamic Symmetry in Composition as Used by the Artists*. New York: Brentano's, 1923.

———. *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry*. New York: Brentano's, 1926.

Ross, Denman W. *A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907.

Wright, Willard Huntington. *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*. New York: J. Lane, 1915.

## **WOMEN ARTISTS AND ART HISTORY**

Much work remains to be done to better understand and appreciate the contributions of women artists in Canada and beyond. These two recent projects are exemplary of the effort underway:

"Canadian Women Artists History Initiative." Concordia University, Montreal, 2012.

"Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art." Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### GEORGIANA UHLYARIK

Georgiana Uhlyarik is Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art, at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). Upcoming projects at the AGO in 2018 include: *Tunirrusiangit: Kenojuak Ashevak and Tim Pitsiulak*, the reinstallation of the Indigenous and Canadian art galleries, and *Christiane Pflug*. Her recent curatorial projects and publications include international collaborations and partnerships: *Florine Stettheimer: Painting Poetry* (2017, with the Jewish Museum, NY), *Georgia O'Keeffe* (2017, with Tate Modern, London, and Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna), and *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* (2016, with Terra Foundation for American Art and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo). Her curatorial collaborations at the AGO include *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light* (2017), *Introducing Suzy Lake* (2015), *The Passion of Kathleen Munn* (2011), and *Betty Goodwin: Work Notes* (2011). Uhlyarik participated in an international research network exploring feminism and curating, funded by the Leverhulme Trust International Networks and led by Professor Lara Perry, University of Brighton (2010–12). She received her honours BA from the University of Toronto and her MA in art history from York University, where she is now adjunct faculty. Uhlyarik has recently been appointed research associate, Modern Literature & Culture, Ryerson University.



**“Munn’s ink drawings of the Passion have intrigued me since I first saw them as a graduate student. I became fascinated by her work and her life: What made her turn to spiritual subjects? What made her give up colour and paint for ink and paper, while her contemporaries were bushwhacking in the Canadian wild? Why did she stop making art at the height of her creativity? Munn will always be a mystery—and this makes her all the more irresistible.”**





## COPYRIGHT & CREDITS

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

#### From the Author

My deepest gratitude to Joyce Zemans, whose pioneering work on Munn has made study of this artist possible, and to Munn's family for their generosity and candour. Many thanks to Mark Cheetham, Sarah Brohman, Meg Taylor, Ruth Gaskill, and all the ACI staff for their dedicated editorial attention. Special thanks to Sara Angel, David Urban, and Ihor Holubizky for liking to talk about Munn almost as much as I do.

#### From the Art Canada Institute

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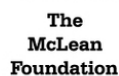
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# KATHLEEN MUNN

Life & Work by Georgiana Uhlyarik



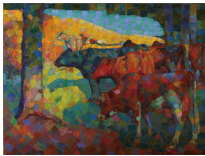
Kathleen Munn, *Last Supper*, 1938. (See below for details.)

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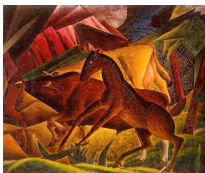
Biography: Munn in the Catskills, c. 1928. (See below for details.)



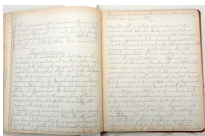
Key Works: Kathleen Munn, *Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Working drawing for the Passion series, c. 1927-38, graphite on paper. Kathleen Munn fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Lenore Richards, 2005. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



Style & Technique: Kathleen Munn, *Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: Notebook, "Synchronism." Kathleen Munn fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Lenore Richards, 2005. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



Where to See: Installation view of Munn exhibition in 2008, Art Gallery of Windsor. (See below for details.)



## Credits for Works by Kathleen Munn



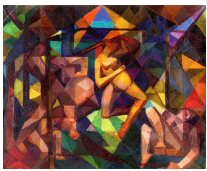
*Composition (Horses)*, c. 1927. Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, purchased with funds donated by the Women's Society of the Edmonton Art Gallery.



*Composition (Reclining Nude)*, c. 1926-28, by Kathleen Munn. Collection of Lynn and Ken Martens. © Estate of Kathleen Munn. Photo credit: John Dean.



*The Crucifixion (Passion Series)*, c. 1934-35. National Gallery of Canada, purchased 1995. Photo © NGC.



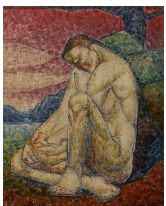
*The Dance*, c. 1923. Collection of Lenore Richards, Toronto.



*Descent from the Cross*, c. 1934-35. Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, gift of Isabel McLaughlin, 1993.



*Last Supper*, 1938. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased 1945.



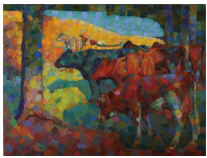
*Mother and Child*, c. 1930. Art Gallery of Hamilton, gift of Yvonne McKague Housser, 1971.



*Still Life*, c. 1925. Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, purchased with funds from the Art Associates of the Edmonton Art Gallery, 1989.



*Untitled (Boxers)*, c. 1925. Collection of Bernard and Sylvia Ostry, promised gift to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



*Untitled (Cows on a Hillside)*, c. 1916. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, purchased with funds donated by Susan and Greg Latremaille, Toronto, 2006.



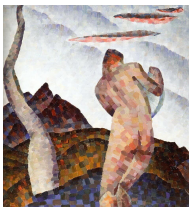
*Untitled (Crucifixion)*, c. 1927-28. Collection of Wayne Richards. Photograph by Kayla Rocca.



*Untitled (Deposition)*, c. 1926-28. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1990.

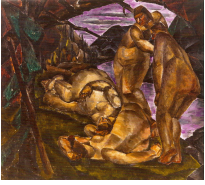


*Untitled (Descent from the Cross)*, c. 1927. Collection of Vincent Tovell, Toronto.

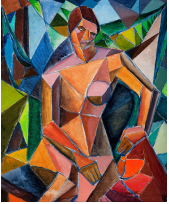


*Untitled (Figure in a Landscape)*, c. 1928-30. Collection of Bernard and Sylvia Ostry, promised gift to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.





*Untitled (Four Figures in the Woods)*, c. 1928-30. Collection of Diane/Evelyn Richards.



*Untitled (Nude in Forest)*, c. 1923. Collection of Bernard and Sylvia Ostry, promised gift to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



*Untitled (Study of Cows)*, c. 1910. Collection of Lenore Richards, Toronto.



*Untitled (Two Nudes in a Landscape)*, c. 1928-30. Collection of Wayne Richards, Toronto. Photograph by Kayla Rocca.



*Untitled I*, c. 1926-28. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1990.



*Untitled II*, c. 1926-28. Collection Lavalin, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.



Working drawing for the Passion series, "Crucified Figure," c. 1927-38 (*left to right*: recto; verso; recto & verso combined, as seen through the light box). Kathleen Munn fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Lenore Richards, 2005. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.

## Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



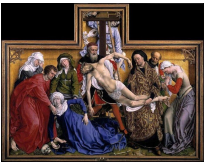
*Both Members of This Club*, 1909, by George Bellows. Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1944.13.1.



*A Breezy Day*, 1903, by Farquhar McGillivray Knowles. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of North American Life Assurance Company, Toronto, 1996.



*Dance (I)*, 1909, by Henri Matisse. Museum of Modern Art, New York, INV. Nr. 201.1963.



*Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, by Rogier van der Weyden. Museo del Prado, Madrid.



*The Dream*, 1912, by Franz Marc. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, INV. Nr. 660 (1978.15).



*The Dying Slave*, c. 1513–15, by Michelangelo. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Historical photograph of the Art Students League. Art Students League of New York. Photographer unknown.





*The Horse in Motion: "Sallie Gardner," Owned by Leland Stanford, c. 1878, by Eadweard Muybridge. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

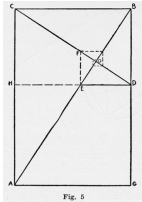
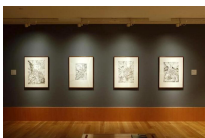


Illustration of the whirling square, from *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* by Jay Hambidge (New York: Brentano's, 1926).



Installation view of Munn exhibition in 2008, Art Gallery of Windsor. Photographer unknown.



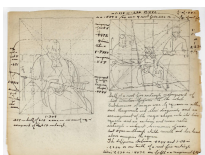
Installation view of Passion series in 2011, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Image provided and reproduced courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.



Kathleen Munn was featured in *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928-1929*, edited by Bertram Brooker. Photograph by Lindsay Maynard.



Kathleen Munn's notebooks. Kathleen Munn fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Lenore Richards, 2005. Photograph by Georgiana Uhlyarik.



Kathleen Munn's notes on Jay Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry. Kathleen Munn fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Lenore Richards, 2005. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



Kathleen Munn's paintbox, with compass set at top right. Private collection, promised gift to the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



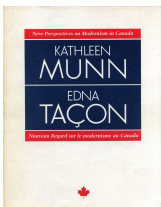
Munn in the Catskills, c. 1928. Collection of Lenore Richards. Photographer unknown.



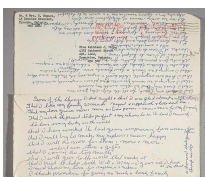
Munn in her Toronto studio in the 1930s. Collection unknown. Photographer unknown.



Munn's light box. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



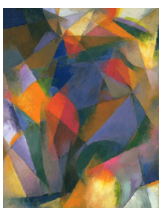
The 1988 catalogue for the touring exhibition that established Munn's role in the development of modern art in Canada. Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Kathleen Munn, Edna Taçon: New Perspectives on Modernism in Canada* by Joyce Zemans, Elizabeth Burrell, and Elizabeth Hunter (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1988).



On an envelope dated May 28, 1974, Kathleen Munn listed "some of the things I did right and... my present thinking." Munn family papers, Toronto. Photograph by Craig Boyko, AGO.



Portrait of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955). M.O. Hammond Collection, National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa. Photograph by M.O. Hammond.



*Synchrony*, 1917, by Stanton Macdonald-Wright. Museum of Modern Art, New York (346.1949).





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# KATHLEEN MUNN

Life & Work by Georgiana Uhlyarik

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Uhlyarik, Georgiana, 1972-, author

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