

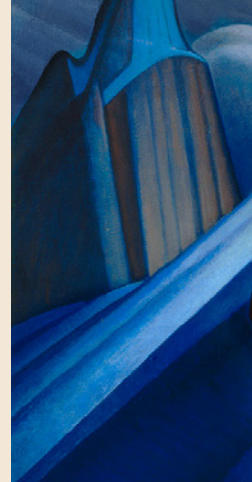
MAY 14, 2021

MAGNETIC VISION THE GROUP OF SEVEN & EMILY CARR AT 101

Passionate that unique Canadian art could spring from encounters with nature, the Group of Seven initiated the country's first major national art movement with landscape-inspired paintings and an enduring legacy—celebrated this spring in three exhibitions



A.Y. Jackson, *Lake Superior Country*, 1924, McMichael Canadian Art Collection



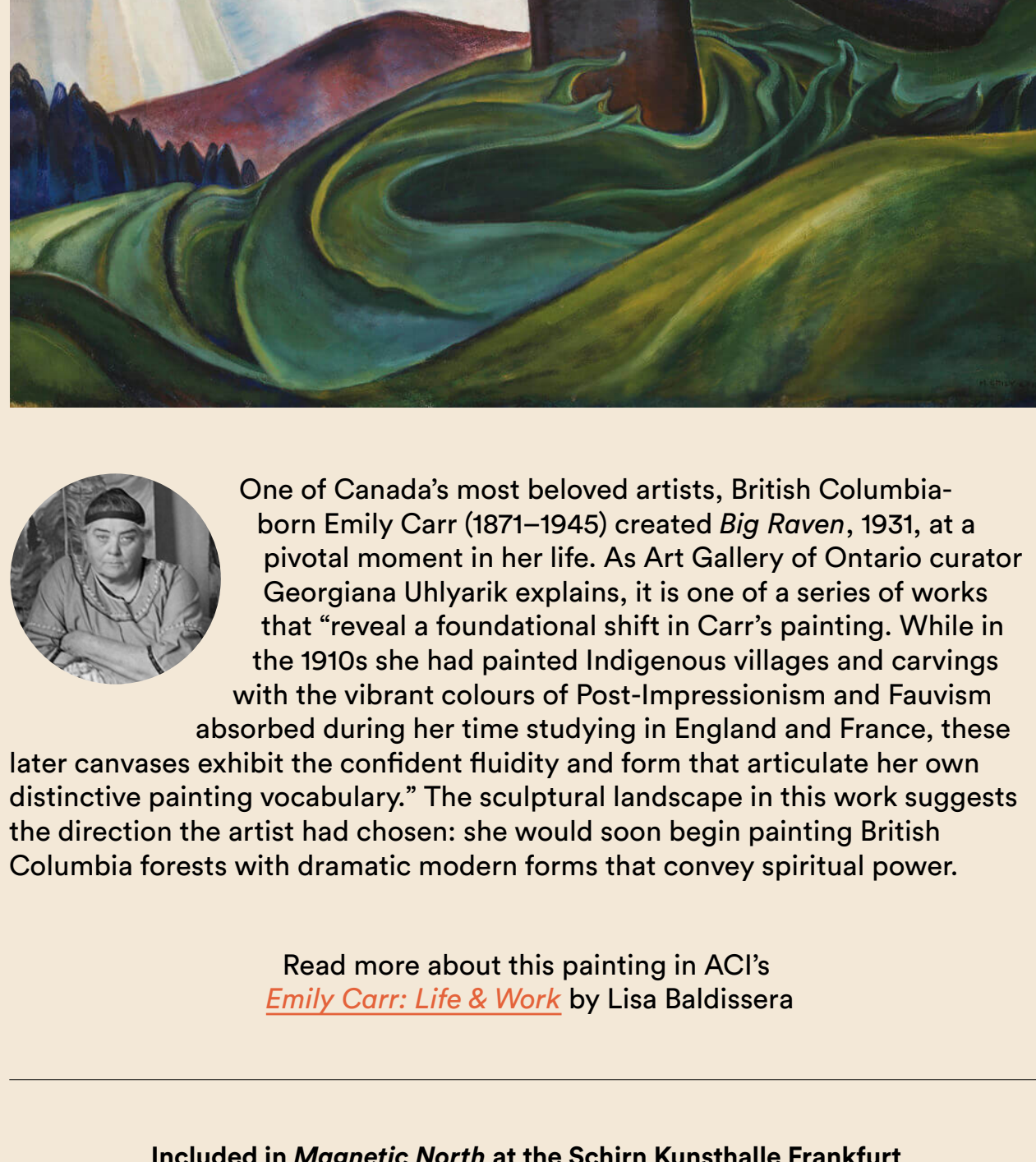
Although now beloved, when the Group of Seven opened its first exhibition, 101 years ago this month, in May 1920 at the Art Museum of Toronto (today the Art Gallery of Ontario), the inaugural show was far from an instant success—only six out of the 120 works featured were sold. A lot has changed over the past century, which has seen this school of Canadian landscape painters rise to iconic status. To honour the centenary of the 1920 exhibition, this year three shows—including one in Germany—are celebrating the Group of Seven and their contemporaries: *Magnetic North: Imagining Canada in Painting, 1910–1940* (organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, National Gallery of Canada, and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt); *A Like Vision: The Group of Seven at 100* (organized by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection); and *Northern Pine: Watercolours and Drawings by the Group of Seven from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection* (organized by the Kelowna Art Gallery). While COVID-19 has limited access to these exhibitions, we're putting them on your radar. As we wait to see shows in person, it's our delight to take you virtually to a number of the highlights of these exhibitions and connect with the remarkable curators who tell the stories of the Group of Seven and its impact on the nation's art.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

Included in *Magnetic North* at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

MT. LEFROY

by Lauren S. Harris



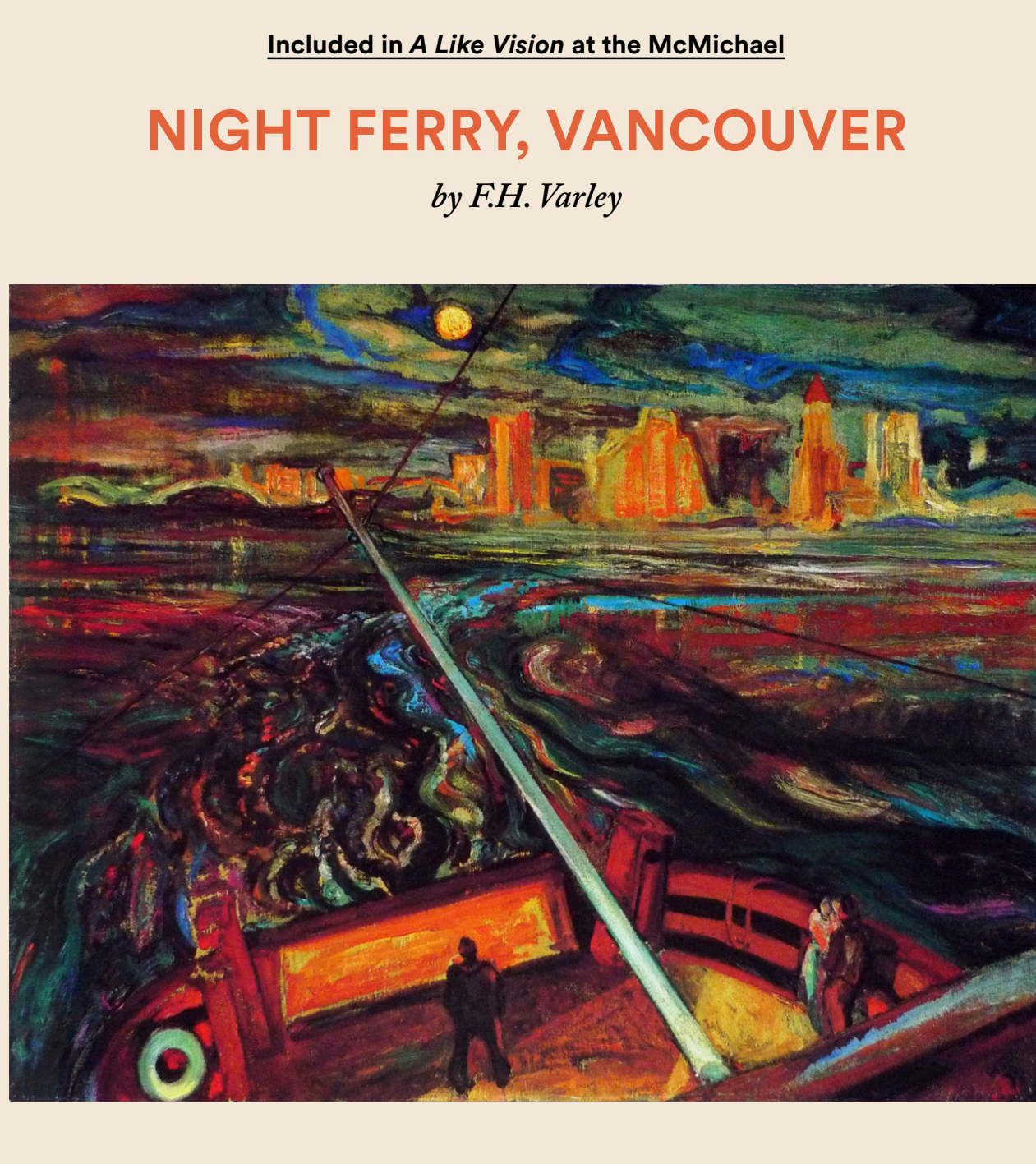
One of the most iconic works of art in Canada, *Mt. Lefroy*, 1930, by the Toronto artist Lawren S. Harris (1885–1970), is widely admired for its majestic form and stunning light, yet it is also at the centre of debates about the politics of landscape. For Harris, the Rocky Mountain peak was a spiritual subject. As well, the Group of Seven's unofficial leader appreciated that the view was political, as images of northern lands were increasingly associated with Canadian national identity. In the *Magnetic North* exhibition, however, audiences are invited to revisit the work in consideration of critical contemporary questions including “How do we relate to the wilderness in an era of climate change?” and “In what ways must we revisit landscape as we learn more about Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization, and reconciliation?”

[Enjoy a virtual tour of the *Magnetic North* exhibition](#)

Included in *Magnetic North* at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

BIG RAVEN

by Emily Carr



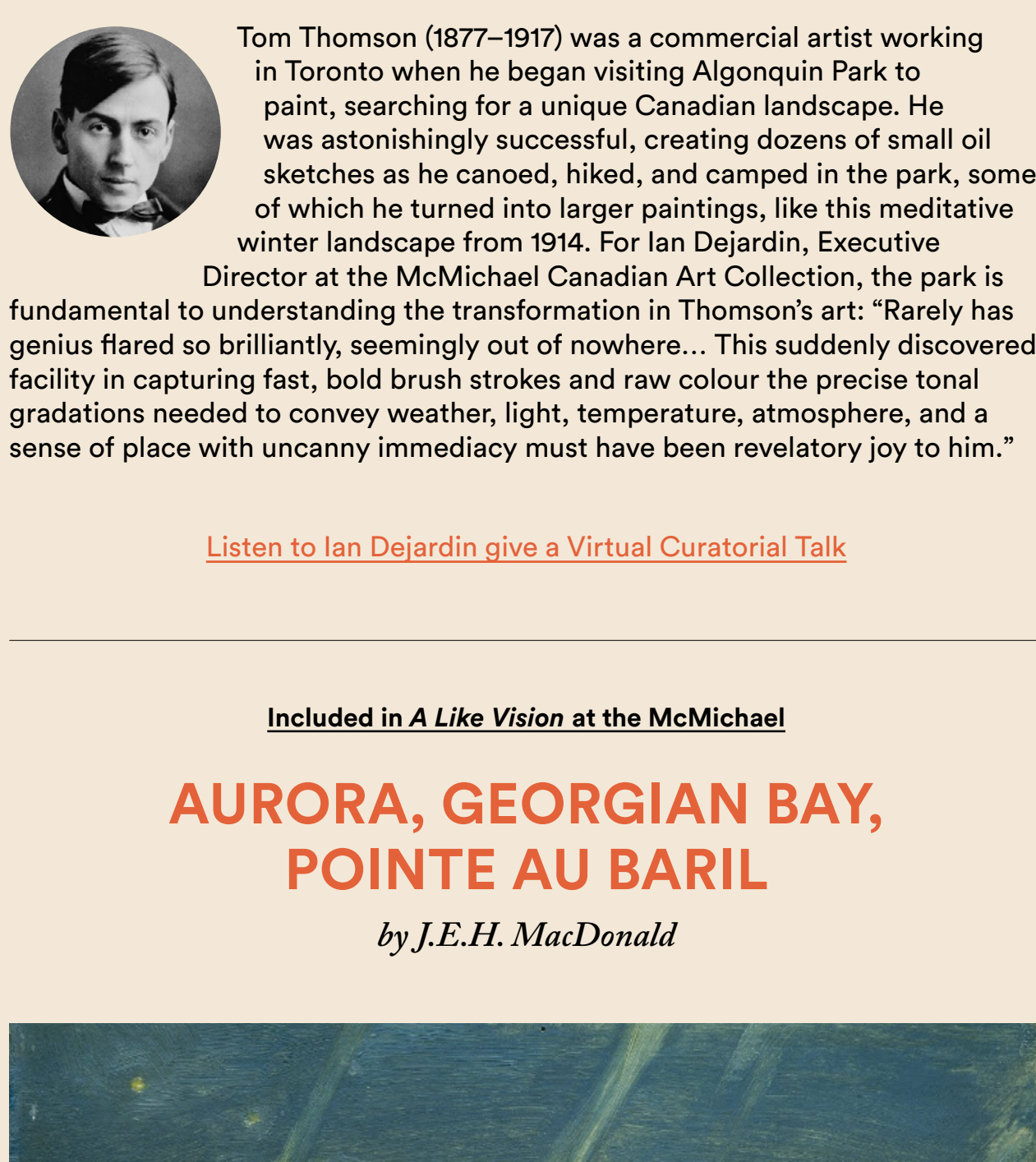
One of Canada's most beloved artists, British Columbia-born Emily Carr (1871–1945) created *Big Raven*, 1931, at a pivotal moment in her life. As Art Gallery of Ontario curator Georgiana Uihyark explains, it is one of a series of works that “reveal a foundational shift in Carr’s painting. While in the 1910s she had painted Indigenous villages and carvings with the vibrant colours of Post-Impressionism and Fauvism absorbed during her time studying in England and France, these later canvases exhibit the confident fluidity and form that articulate her own distinctive painting vocabulary.” The sculptural landscape in this work suggests the direction the artist had chosen: she would soon begin painting British Columbia forests with dramatic modern forms that convey spiritual power.

Read more about this painting in ACI's
[Emily Carr: Life & Work](#) by Lisa Baldissera

Included in *Magnetic North* at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

LAKE SUPERIOR COUNTRY

by A.Y. Jackson



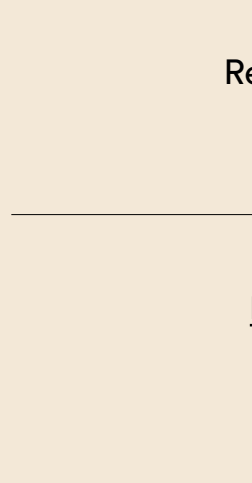
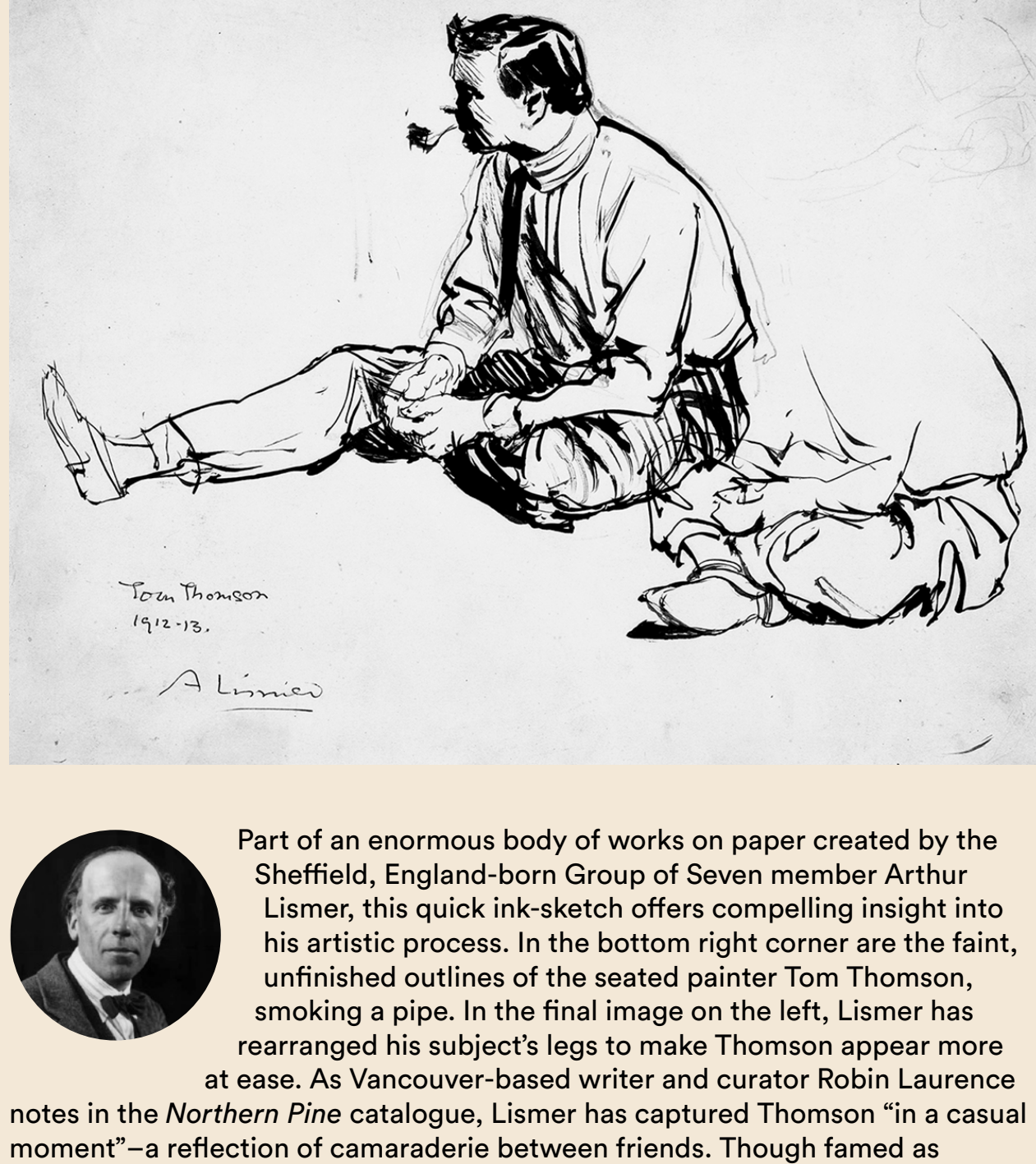
For Group of Seven member A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Lake Superior's north shore was the most impressive subject for landscape painting in Canada. The Montreal-born, Toronto-based artist was fascinated by the rocky ground and dense forests, and in the dynamic *Lake Superior Country*, 1924, he adopted a vivid palette of intense colours to capture the vibrant energy of the place, working with purples and reds, golds and greens. Art Gallery of Ontario curator Renée van der Avoird has noted interesting tensions at play in this work, observing that despite its extraordinary palette, it “is a lonely scene, devoid of the human habitation and industry that existed in the area” and yet, at the same time, it “is a testament to Jackson's command of landscapes, and his ability to play within this genre.”

[Read an exhibition essay by Renée van der Avoird](#)

Included in *A Like Vision* at the McMichael

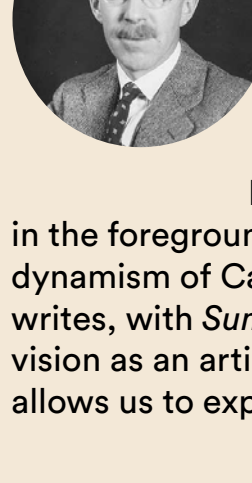
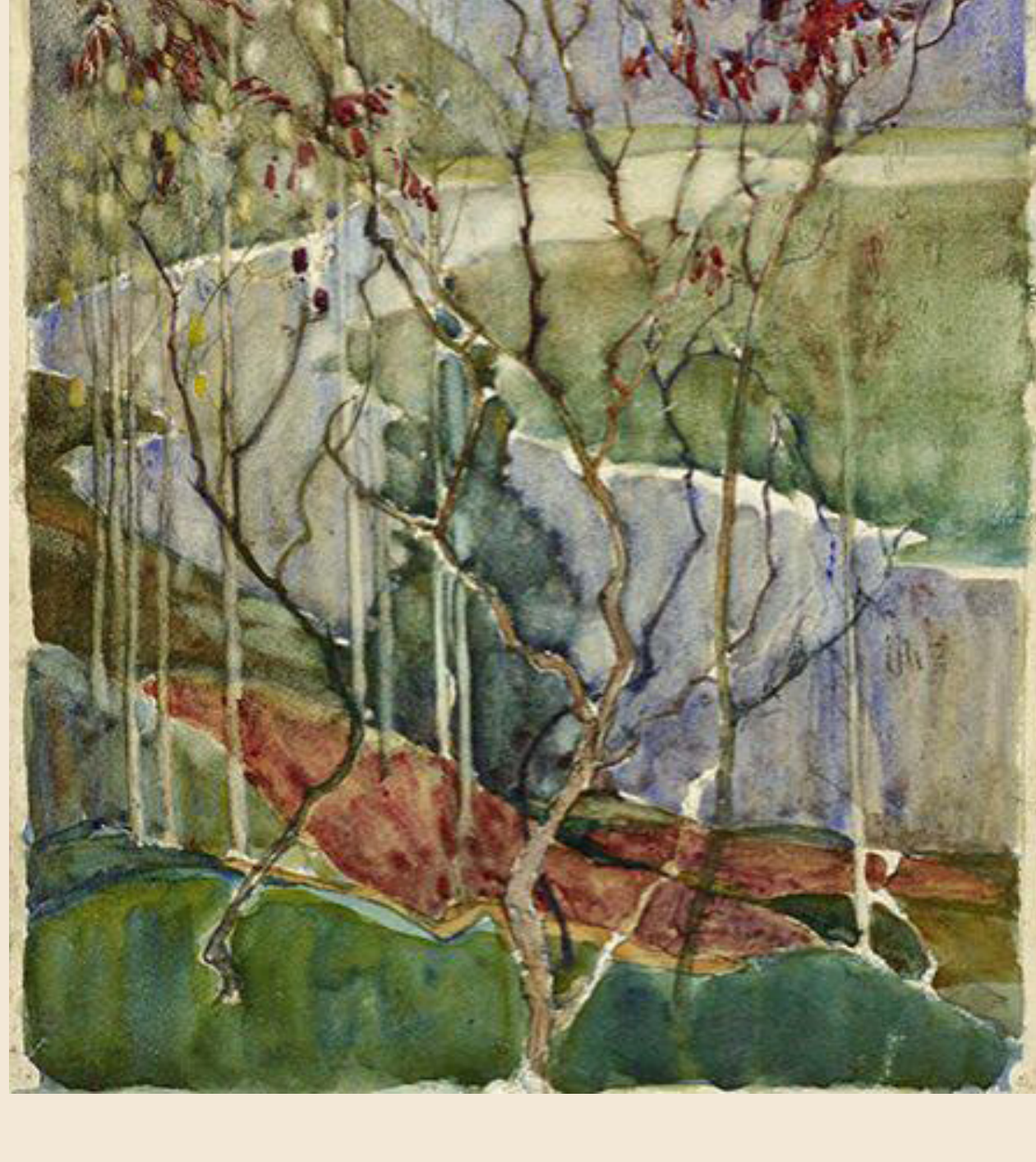
NIGHT FERRY, VANCOUVER

by F.H. Varley



Living in Toronto when the Group of Seven formed in 1920, F.H. Varley (1881–1969) moved to British Columbia in 1926 to teach at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts. There he painted the highly expressive *Night Ferry, Vancouver*, 1937, offering a daring vision of the city after dark. Describing his work on the canvas, Varley wrote that he was “having lots of fun in spasmodic moments getting drunk with colour & fat gobs of paint.” The contemporary artist John Hartman has described this work as one of Varley's masterpieces, observing that the work “gets more fascinating as you come in closer to it.... Even though the paint handling and application are quite different in the sky, the water and the ferry, it all comes together as a wonderful whole.”

[See Varley's Painting in Augmented Reality](#)



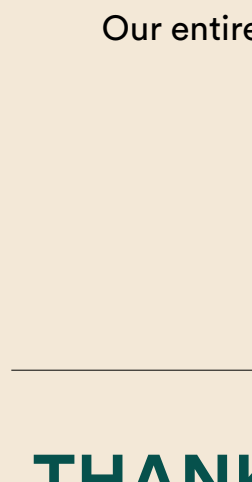
Tom Thomson (1877–1917) was a commercial artist working in Toronto when he began visiting Algonquin Park to paint, searching for a unique Canadian landscape. He was astonishingly successful, creating dozens of small oil sketches as he canoed, hiked, and camped in the park, some of which he turned into larger paintings, like this meditative winter landscape from 1914. For Ian DeJardin, Executive Director at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the park is fundamental to understanding the transformation in Thomson's art: “Rarely has genius flared so brilliantly, seemingly out of nowhere... This suddenly discovered facility in capturing fast, bold brush strokes and raw colour the park, some gradations needed to convey weather, light, temperature, atmosphere, and a sense of place with uncanny immediacy must have been revelatory joy to him.”

[Listen to Ian DeJardin give a Virtual Curatorial Talk](#)

Included in *A Like Vision* at the McMichael

AURORA, GEORGIAN BAY, POINTE AU BARIL

by J.E.H. MacDonald



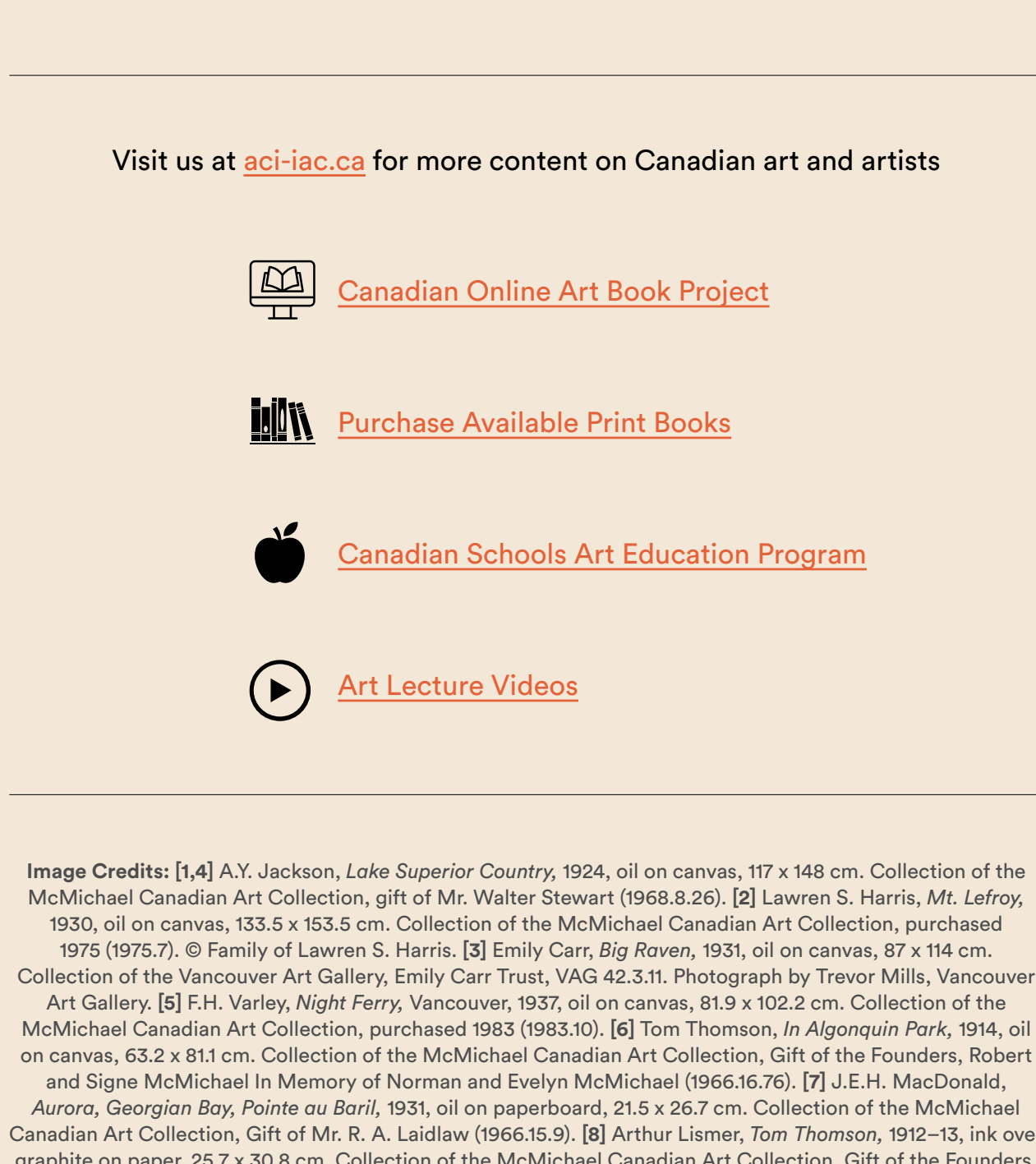
With *Aurora, Georgian Bay, Pointe au Baril*, 1931, J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) offers us a stunning view of the Northern lights in one of his final landscapes, created after a short trip to the bay in September of that year. This brilliant image of a celestial phenomenon, beautifully sketched with delicate blues and greens, was informed by the artist's years of experiments in painting the Canadian landscape. As McMichael Chief Curator Sarah Milroy reminds us, MacDonald and his fellow Group of Seven members Varley and Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) were British immigrants whose works might be understood as “gestures of reconnaissance, grappling even, with a new landscape for which they were culturally unprepared.” Milroy adds, “there are as many ways of seeing these paintings as there are Canadians looking at them.”

[Watch Sarah Milroy lead a discussion about the Group of Seven](#)

Included in *Northern Pine* at the Kelowna Art Gallery

TOM THOMSON

by Arthur Lismer



Part of an enormous body of works on paper created by the Sheffield, England-born Group of Seven members Arthur Lismer, this quick ink-sketch offers compelling insight into his artistic process. In the bottom right corner are the faint, unfinished outlines of the seated painter Tom Thomson, smoking a pipe. In the final image on the left, Lismer has rearranged his subject's legs to make Thomson appear more at ease. As Vancouver-based writer and curator Robin Laurence notes in the *Northern Pine* catalogue, Lismer has captured Thomson “in a casual moment”—a reflection of camaraderie between friends. Though famed as landscape painters, several members of the Group of Seven were exceptionally gifted in drawing.

Read about Lismer's friendship with Thomson in ACI's
[Tom Thomson: Life & Work](#) by David Silcox

Included in *Northern Pine* at the Kelowna Art Gallery

SUMACHS

by Franklin Carmichael

Capturing the lush jewel tones of the Canadian landscape, *Sumachs*, 1915, illustrates Orillia-born Group of Seven member Franklin Carmichael's (1890–1945) mastery of watercolour painting and his sophisticated approach to pictorial design. Between the thin, meandering branches and red leaves of the sumachs we are offered a breathtaking glimpse of a bending river bordered by mountainous landforms. Our attention constantly moves between the trees in the foreground and the natural scenery in the background, reflecting the dynamism of Carmichael's compositions. As Ian Thom, curator of *Northern Pine*, writes, with *Sumachs* the artist “brings both his sensitivity as a designer and his vision as an artist together.... He has brought a vast landscape to the page and allows us to experience it dramatically and forcefully.”

[View the exhibition in a video tour with Ian Thom](#)

Included in *Northern Pine* at the Kelowna Art Gallery

ILLUSTRATION WITH FIGURE

by Frank Johnston

Like most members of the Group of Seven, Frank Johnston (1888–1949) worked at commercial art firms—including Grip Limited in Toronto, where in 1911 he met his fellow painters J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, and Franklin Carmichael—and created such pictures as *Illustration with Figure*, 1925. Best known for his gouaches—opaque watercolour paintings—here Johnston depicts a woman enjoying a stroll within a natural setting. The lack of detail in the scenery reveals Johnston's primary interest in the relationships between areas of solid colour, while the feminine figure and sinuous lines of the tree on the right reflect the influence of Art Nouveau and its emphasis on decorative and flowing natural forms. A founding member of the Group of Seven, Johnston relocated to Manitoba to teach in 1921 and formally ended his association with the Group in 1924.

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