



112 Alfred Joseph (A.J.) Casson

CGP CSPWC G7 OC POSA PRCA 1898 – 1992

Frosty Morning

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled and inscribed
Birthday Gift 1963 to Mary Ellen Fleck and 43 Rochester Ave.
 Toronto on the 1952 Royal Canadian Academy of Arts label, 1949
 24 x 30 in, 61 x 76.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist, Toronto
 Acquired as a gift by Mr. and Mrs. A.W. Fleck, Ottawa, 1963
 Galerie d'Art Vincent, Ottawa
 Private Collection, New York, 1994
 Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, 1951, listed page 9
 Paul Duval, *A.J. Casson*, 1951, reproduced page 57

73rd Annual Exhibition, Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Montreal
 Museum of Fine Arts, 1952, reproduced as frontispiece
 Paul Duval, *Four Decades: The Canadian Group of Painters and
 Their Contemporaries*, 1972, reproduced page 29
 A.J. Casson, Art Gallery of Windsor, 1978, listed page 42
 Evelyn McMann, *Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Exhibitions
 and Members 1880 – 1979*, 1981, listed page 66

EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Hamilton, *Winter Exhibition*, 1950
 Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, 1951, catalogue #2
 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 73rd Annual Exhibition, Royal
 Canadian Academy of Arts, November 14 – December 7, 1952

FROSTY MORNING CAPTURES one of A.J. Casson's favourite
 sites, the Cloche Mountains, at one of his preferred times of
 day for outdoor sketching, early morning.¹ Renowned art writer
 Paul Duval described the "luminous" results of this felicitous

confluence as "one of Casson's most telling atmospheric can-
 vases."² Located north of Manitoulin Island, the Precambrian
 topography of the Cloche Mountains would inspire some of
 Casson's most iconic works, such as *White Pine* (1957), an oil on
 canvas painted for the collector Robert McMichael based on a
 1948 watercolour.³

The Cloche Mountains had also been a sketching ground of
 Casson's mentor Franklin Carmichael (1890 – 1945), a founding
 member of the Group of Seven. Casson was the beneficiary of a
 demanding but fruitful apprenticeship to Carmichael at Rous &
 Mann, one of Toronto's leading commercial art firms, beginning
 in 1919. This master-apprentice relationship had gradually blos-
 somed into friendship and mutual respect, with the two artists
 becoming frequent sketching companions. In 1926, while leaving
 a party at the home of Lawren Harris, Carmichael would casu-
 ally inform Casson that he would fill the vacancy left by Franz
 Johnston, who had resigned his membership in the Group to ful-
 fill teaching obligations in 1924.⁴ So it was that Casson became
 the youngest member of the legendary Group.

Casson's association with the Group of Seven would prove
 to be something of a mixed blessing. A 1928 sketching trip to
 the north shore of Lake Superior with Carmichael, Harris and
 A.Y. Jackson brought invaluable opportunities for Casson to hone
 his mastery of composition with the hawk-eyed Jackson, while
 observing the burgeoning abstraction of Harris's northern land-
 scapes.⁵ However, the trip also alerted Casson to the potential
 "dangers" inherent in the magnetic influence exerted by senior
 Group members.⁶ Always an independent spirit, Casson would
 increasingly seek to distinguish himself from his more estab-
 lished peers.

To wit, Casson pursued a judicious "foot in both camps" policy
 with respect to institutional affiliations, becoming an associate
 member of the more conservative Royal Canadian Academy
 (RCA) in 1926—the same year he joined forces with the rebellious
 Group of Seven.⁷ He would ultimately be elected president of
 the RCA in 1949, the year *Frosty Morning* was painted. Casson's
 predilection for the watercolour medium was another assertion
 of autonomy. About three-quarters of Casson's production is
 in watercolour, a chronically neglected medium that he would
 actively promote by co-founding the Canadian Society of Paint-
 ers in Water Colour with Carmichael and Fred Brigden in 1925.
 The transparency of watercolour is skilfully translated into oil in
Frosty Morning, suggested by Casson's masterful handling of pal-
 ette knife to indicate reflections on the crystalline surface of the
 central pool.

The "domino"-like roofs of *Frosty Morning's* picturesque
 buildings are a subtle indication of the mild Cubism that marked
 Casson's production after 1945.⁸ This turn to abstraction can
 be understood as a nod to the growing internationalism of the
 post-war art scene in Canada, but it is also a sure sign of Harris's
 lingering influence. At the same time, Casson's choice of subject
 is consistent with the artist's long-standing exploration of the
 unique architectural heritage of Ontario towns and villages, what
 he dubbed his "Ontario quest."⁹

"If I have to define my own contribution to the Canadian art
 scene," he reflected in a 1978 interview, "what was particularly
 mine were really the rural villages and houses."¹⁰ This focus was
 intended to differentiate Casson's work from Jackson's paintings

of rural Quebec. Such signs of habitation also distinguish
 Casson's pictures from Harris's otherworldly landscapes. The
 Kanien'kehá: ka curator Wahsontiiio Cross views Casson's lived-in
 landscapes—nourished by boyhood rambles in Guelph and an
 influential early sketching trip to then rural Meadowvale—as
 aligned with contemporary Anishinaabe artist Michael Belmore's
 "respect for the land."¹¹

We thank Adam Lauder for contributing the above essay.
 Lauder is an art historian based in Toronto. He is an instructor at
 the University of Toronto and an adjunct professor at the Ontario
 College of Art and Design.

1. See Christopher E. Jackson, *A.J. Casson: An Artist's Life*
 (Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1998),
 46; Paul Duval, *Alfred Joseph Casson: President, Royal Canadian
 Academy* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1951), 26.
2. Duval, *Alfred Joseph Casson*, 25.
3. See Jackson, *A.J. Casson*, 47.
4. *Ibid.*, 37; "Franz Johnston," National Gallery of Canada,
 n.d., <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artist/franz-johnston>.
5. See "A.J. Casson in Conversation," in *A.J. Casson* (Windsor, ON:
 Art Gallery of Windsor, 1978), exhibition catalogue, iii.
6. Jackson, *A.J. Casson*, 38.
7. Margaret Gray, Margaret Rand, and Lois Steen,
A.J. Casson (Agincourt, ON: Gage, 1976), 13.
8. Duval, *Alfred Joseph Casson*, 27.
9. "A.J. Casson in Conversation," iii.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Wahsontiiio Cross, *Nkweshkdaadiimgak Miinwaa
 Bakeziibiisan/Confluences and Tributaries/Confluents et
 affluents: Michael Belmore/A.J. Casson* (Ottawa: Ottawa Art
 Gallery, 2018), exhibition catalogue, 9.

ESTIMATE: \$250,000 – 350,000