



## 110 Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

### Masset, Q.C.I.

oil on canvas, signed M. Emily Carr, titled *Masset, Q.C.I.* and dated 1912 and on verso inscribed \$35.00 and faintly *Miss Carr / chez R. Charbo 96 Blvd Montparnasse* on a label 16 ¼ x 13 in, 41.3 x 33 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Possibly a gift from the Artist to Nell Cozier, Victoria and then New York  
Private Estate, Hamptons, New York  
Acquired from the above by the present Private Collection, New York

#### LITERATURE

Doris Shadbolt, editor, *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, 1993, *Growing Pains: An Autobiography* (1946), pages 446 – 447  
*Emily Carr: Fresh Seeing—French Modernism and the West Coast*, Audain Art Museum, 2019, the boulevard du Montparnasse address mentioned page 71

#### EXHIBITED

Dominion Hall, Vancouver, *Paintings of Indian Totem Poles and Indian Life by Emily Carr*, April 1913 (possibly)

THIS WONDERFUL, BOLD painting shows a great memorial post that stood in Masset, Haida Gwaii, when Emily Carr went on her major sketching trip to northern First Nations villages in 1912. She makes you feel the massive size of this bear that towers at the level of the roofs of the European-style houses that had recently replaced the multi-family Haida lineage houses.

The painting is part of Carr’s project to create an extensive record of First Nations’ artistic heritage in British Columbia. During the summer of 1912, she had obtained a pass from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and traveled on its steamships up the BC coast to villages in Kwakwaka’wakw, Gitksan and Haida territories. The *Vancouver Province* announced her return in its Social and Personal News section:

Miss M. Emily Carr, the well-known artist, has just returned from a two-months’ tour of the Queen Charlotte Islands and the Skeena River country. Her object was to make sketches of the representative totems of these out-of-the-way places. Miss Carr’s trip was successful and she has added greatly to her already large collection of paintings of totem poles and other things of interest in the remote parts of the province.<sup>1</sup>

Her image of the grizzly bear memorial post was one of almost 200 pictures of totem poles and First Nations villages that Carr went on to assemble for a large exhibition she held in Vancouver’s Dominion Hall in April 1913. In a “Lecture on Totems” that she gave for the show, she told her audience:

I glory in our wonderful West and I [would] like to leave behind me some of the relics of its first primitive greatness. These things should be to us Canadians what the ancient Britons’ relics are to the English. Only a few more years and they will be gone forever, into silent nothingness, and I would gather my collection together before they are forever past.<sup>2</sup>



TOP: FIGURE 1: Masset in 1910  
Photo: Herbert B. Tschudy

BOTTOM: FIGURE 2: The village of Masset, circa 1880  
Photo: Stephen Allen Spencer

To put the painting into context, we must realize that Carr was an enterprising member of the white settler tide then sweeping up the North Coast with its extraction industries—canneries, lumber camps and mining towns. Yet as a rebel and contrarian since childhood, Carr sympathized with the Indigenous peoples, noticing their understanding of the land and fascinated with their monumental crest poles and intricate basketry. Critical as she was of settler institutions like the missionaries and schools, she hoped to be a champion for the merits of the Indigenous population and their traditions.

She was just back from a period of study in Paris, where her teachers had confirmed her admiration for the artistic qualities of Indigenous traditional carving. She made her paintings of 1912 to 1913 in a bold Post-Impressionist style, and *Masset, Q.C.I.* shows us how fluent and confident she had become in her use of colour to put in her outlines, to model forms through a gradation of hues, and to convey the rich sense of outdoor light that inflects



FIGURE 3: EMILY CARR  
**Bear Totem, Masset, Q.C.I.**  
 oil on canvas, 1937  
 39 1/2 x 13 3/4 inches, 100.3 x 35 cm  
 Collection of the BC Archives, PDPO0586  
 Not for sale with this lot

local colours with contrasts and reflections. In the seven months between her coastal tour and her exhibition, Carr attained the confidence and speed necessary to turn her sketch material into an array of vivid paintings, of which this is an outstanding example.

Carr's visit to Haida Gwaii occurred exactly 50 years after the devastating 1862 smallpox epidemic that reduced the population from about 30,000 to fewer than 600, causing the remaining people soon after to consolidate into two main centres, Skidegate and Masset.<sup>3</sup> In Masset Carr had found that only a few poles remained, and she sketched them in watercolour so she could make oil paintings from the sketches in her studio afterwards.<sup>4</sup> She was particularly impressed with this huge and imposing memorial pole of a grizzly bear mounted on a post, and it appears both in her general view of the centre of the village and, as we see here, alone in close-up.<sup>5</sup>

Carr's paintings show the modern houses in these villages, where leading Haida chiefs had decided in the 1880s to invite missionaries who could instruct them in the English language and Western ways and better equip them to deal with the settler influx into their territories. Photographs taken at the time (figures 1 and 2) reveal the rapid changes that ensued, and Carr's painting of Masset shows clearly the blend of tradition and modernity that she found there. With the assistance of Haida guides, she also visited many of the no longer inhabited villages to sketch the great stands of poles and frames of the lineage houses remaining there.

In 1937, when she was briefly bedridden after a serious heart attack and writing the stories that would become her book *Klee Wyck*, Carr revisited her memories of traveling to Masset and painted the same grizzly bear memorial post again, though from the other side. She based that work (figure 3), and another painting with two bears, on a different 1912 view of the village, which suggests she no longer had the oil painting of the single pole in her possession.<sup>6</sup>

What Carr could not know is that this grizzly bear post and her picture are a hinge between the past and the future. The bear was a popular crest among the northern Haida and Tlingit clans, and a frequent motif on their poles and regalia. The memorial pole in Carr's picture and the house behind it belonged to the Edenshaw family. It was the home of the great carver Daxhiigang Charles Edenshaw and of his daughter Jadał q'egəngá Florence Davidson, who could have glanced through the window and seen Emily sketching. The bear in her painting was a memorial to Charles Edenshaw's wife's mother's sister.<sup>7</sup> Charles Edenshaw himself would become the great-great-uncle of Iljuwas Bill Reid, and his daughter Florence the grandmother of Guud San Glans Robert Davidson. Both of these artists, now as famous as Carr herself, have continued the life of this grizzly bear through their art, as leaders of the strong revival of Haida art that has flourished from the 1960s to today (figures 4, 5 and 6).

We thank Gerta Moray, Professor Emerita, University of Guelph, and author of *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*, for contributing the above essay.

1. Province (Vancouver), September 14, 1912, cited in Gerta Moray, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 97.

2. Susan Crean, ed., *Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journals of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2003), 203, and Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 132–34.

3. Nika Collison, "Creating for Culture: Edenshaw's Haida Roots," in *Charles Edenshaw* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, in assoc. with Black Dog Publishing, 2014), exhibition catalogue, 21.

4. For Carr's sketching in the field and painting in the studio, see Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 96–97, 133–34 and passim.

5. For the circumstances Carr encountered in Haida Gwaii, and for her work there, see Moray, *Unsettling Encounters*, 110–22.

6. The 1937 painting *Bear Totem, Masset, Q.C.I.* is in the BC Archives, Victoria. *Masset Bears* is in the Vancouver Art Gallery. The painting on which they are based, *Masset QCI* (1912), is now in the Vancouver Museum.

7. Margaret B. Blackman, *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, a Haida Woman* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982), 55. The memorial post is listed as House 21, [pole] 21X in George F. MacDonald, *Haida Monumental Art: Villages of the Queen Charlotte Islands* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 148.

THIS PAINTING RECENTLY returned to Canada after many decades in the state of New York, where it was rediscovered in a heritage barn on Long Island. This work was most likely a gift from Emily Carr to her friend Nell Cozier and her husband. The couple were originally from Victoria and moved to Long Island, where they were caretakers for a large estate. Under the guidance of Lawren Harris, Carr traveled to New York in 1930. Carr took the train to visit Nell and her husband on Long Island for a week around Easter, as described in her own words in the "New York" chapter of *Growing Pains: The Autobiography of Emily Carr*:

A couple of warm friends of mine who used to farm out west had written to me when they knew I was coming to Toronto inviting, "Cross the line and visit us." They now lived on Long Island, where the husband had been for some years manager of a millionaire's estate. I wired my friend asking, "Could you meet me at the station in New York? I'm scared stiff of New York!"

Upon her arrival in the city, Carr continues her account:

Noises changed, we were slithering into a great covered station. There on the platform, having paddled through rain at that hour, was my friend, Nell. I nearly broke the window rapping on it. She waved her umbrella and both hands. . . .

The distance from station to station seemed no way at all, we were talking so hard. Suddenly I remembered and said, "Why, Nell, is this New York?" Soon our train began skimming over beautiful green fields. The very up-to-date farm buildings and fences were here and there, and such beautiful horses were in the pastures.

"Nell, where are we?"

"On Long Island. This is where the millionaires and the multi-millionaires come to recuperate when Society ructions have worn them threadbare. These sumptuous estates are what the millionaires are pleased to call their 'country cottages'."

My friends lived on the home farm of their own particular millionaire's estate, in a large, comfortable farm house.

Additional descriptions of Carr's time on Long Island can be found in the same chapter of *Growing Pains*.

The frame for this painting is also notable. Carr was famously included in the 1911 *Salon d'Automne* in Paris. She sent paintings for possible submission to Chez R. Charbo, 96, boulevard du Montparnasse, which was an art supply shop in Paris. It is possible that she had her paintings sent from Brittany to R. Charbo and had the shop arrange for their presentation to the jury. The painting is included in a period frame and the faint inscription on the verso label indicates this frame was likely first used for a different painting by Carr. The orientation of the original hanging hooks and label indicate that the first painting was horizontal.

We thank Dr. Michael Polay, contributing author to *Emily Carr: Fresh Seeing—French Modernism and the West Coast*, for his assistance in researching this lot.

ESTIMATE: \$100,000 – 200,000



TOP: FIGURE 4: DAXHIIGANG CHARLES EDENSHAW (ATTRIBUTED)  
**Comptote**, pre-1888, argillite  
 Alaska State Museum, Juneau  
 Not for sale with this lot

MIDDLE: FIGURE 5: ILJUWAS BILL REID  
**Bear Sculpture**, circa 1963  
 Museum of Anthropology at UBC  
 Not for sale with this lot

BOTTOM: FIGURE 6: GUUD SAN GLANS ROBERT DAVIDSON  
**Grizzly Bear**  
 serigraph, 2009  
 Not for sale with this lot