



121 Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

Old and New Forest

oil on board on canvas, signed and on verso
titled on the Dominion Gallery label, circa 1935
14 x 16 1/4 in, 35.6 x 41 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist, Victoria
Collection of Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher and Dr. Julius Schleicher, Victoria and then Ottawa
Acquired from the above by Dr. Max Stern, Montreal, May 10, 1958
Dominion Gallery, Montreal
Acquired from the above by Mrs. D. Lissner, Montreal, September 5, 1958

The Art Emporium, Vancouver
Private Collection, Toronto

THIS PAINTING, WHICH combines all the characteristic features of Emily Carr’s work in 1934 – 1935, was one of several that she gifted to her young friend and fellow artist Edythe Hembroff.¹ Its significance is enhanced when we understand the context of the two artists’ relationship.

In the spring of 1930, Hembroff, then aged 23, had returned to Victoria from Paris after completing her art training in the modernist studio of André Lhote, following preliminary studies in San Francisco. Struck by this coincidence in their training, Carr had telephoned the young woman and invited her to tea. Thus began a relationship of some significance for Carr.

Although Carr had been in touch from the mid-1920s with the modernist art circles of Seattle and since 1927 with the Group of

Seven in Toronto, and had won both national acclaim and some local acknowledgement, she felt starved for artist companionship in the conservative and provincial environment of Victoria. Now, here was a young woman straight from Paris who could understand and sympathize with her work and who did not pose the threat that Carr felt from young male artists in Victoria, Jack Shadbolt and Max Maynard, whom she regarded as competitors trying to copy her ideas.

Hembroff came with news of Parisian art in the fluid post-war twenties, when late Cubism, neoclassicism, Art Deco and other formal styles were vying for attention. Her Paris teacher, Lhote, was a leading exponent of the Art Deco trend that applied a Cubist sense of geometry and ornament to a classicizing figure style. Carr, herself an experienced senior artist, could now become Edythe’s mentor and guide in the local scene.

Emily found Edythe so congenial that by the spring of 1931, she proposed a sketching trip together, which they spent at Cordova Bay, based at the Hembroff family cottage. They made two further joint trips, in 1931 to Goldstream Park and in May 1932 to the Sooke Hills, where they stayed in a disused hunting lodge belonging to a friend of Carr’s, Mrs. McVicar. They also painted and sketched together in Victoria during the winter seasons. Hembroff was thus an intimate contact during a period of momentous development in Carr’s career.

The Carr whom she met in 1930 was a formidable artist.² Carr’s dark, brooding, powerful canvases of 1928 to 1930 represented Indigenous villages and coastal forests with a sculptural stylization inspired by the carved forms on Indigenous masks and totem poles, by the austere art of Lawren Harris, and by her study of books and magazines, through which she sought to extend her understanding of the modern movements in Europe. Despite the success of her new, monumental paintings,³ Carr was experiencing a crisis in her search for an artistic language of her own, one that would enable her to capture her vision of the BC coastal landscape.

As Hembroff looked on, Carr was making studies of tree forms and experimental compositions in charcoal and monochrome tones of black paint. She was drawn to the modernist requirement for formal design exemplified by Lhote, among many others. Yet she sensed her current stylized rendering constricted her when applied to landscape: “My aims are changing and I feel lost and perplexed,” she wrote in her journal in January of 1931. “I’ve been to the woods today. It’s there but I can’t catch hold.” A week later she noted she had “done a charcoal sketch today of young pines at the foot of a forest, I may make a canvas out of it. It should lead from joy back to mystery—young pines full of light and joyousness against a background of moving mysterious forest.”⁴

The charcoal study she described may be *Untitled* (figure 1) or another like it and shows that Carr was now looking for expressive motifs in the local woodlands. It marks the emergence of a theme enshrined in the oil painting *Old and New Forest*, an emphasis on the stages of life, through youth to maturity, old age and death. Carr first developed this suggestive juxtaposition of elements as the two artists—one old, one young—worked side by side around Victoria and Cordova Bay.⁵

Hembroff’s own training and chief interest, however, was not in landscape but in figure painting, a particular focus in Lhote’s studio. In December 1931, Carr recorded in a letter: “Edythe

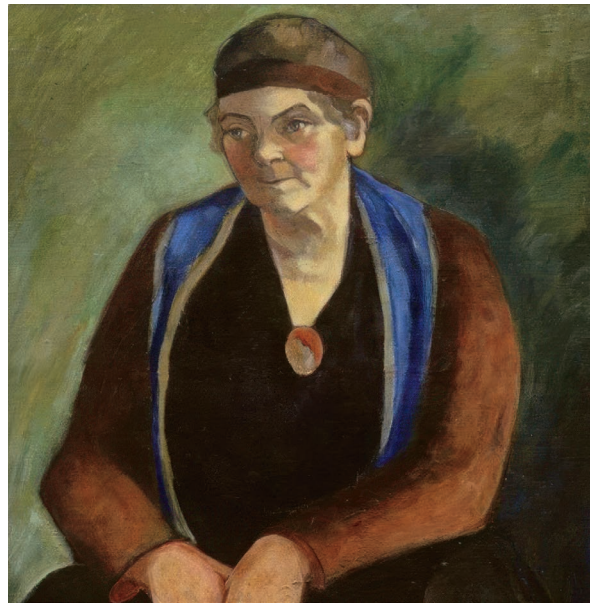


FIGURE 1: EMILY CARR
Untitled
charcoal on paper, 1930 – 1931
24 1/2 x 19 in, 62.6 x 48.2 cm
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, 42.3.121

Not for sale with this lot

Hembroff and I have been painting in my studio—hers is small & pokey. We did each other and ourselves in glasses [mirrors].”⁶ Hembroff too described their activities: “After sketching for the year was over and we were working in the studio again, I said to Emily, ‘I am always doing what you like to do. I have painted at least a thousand trees. Why shouldn’t we do a still life or a portrait for a change?’ ... [Emily] had fun with the still life but she quickly became bored with the portraits. ... By the time she got to me, she was impatient to finish off a bad bargain and, as she worked, she occasionally burst into song: ‘Oh! would that you were a tree-ee-ee...’”⁷ The generational gap between the two artists is clear in Hembroff’s reverential portrait of Carr (figure 2), and her own self-portrait as a smart young woman (figure 3).

By the time Carr painted *Old and New Forest*, the two artists were no longer sketching together. Hembroff had left Victoria for Vancouver at the end of 1933 and in 1934 married Frederick Brand, a young UBC professor of mathematics who had himself been a long-time friend and supporter of Carr. The two artists now exchanged letters, Carr’s addressed to “My dear Edythe,”



TOP: FIGURE 2: **EDYTHE HEMBROFF-SCHLEICHER**
Portrait of Emily Carr
oil on canvas, 1932
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Not for sale with this lot



BOTTOM: FIGURE 3: **EDYTHE HEMBROFF-SCHLEICHER**
Self-Portrait
oil on board, 1931
13 1/4 x 10 1/4, 34.1 x 26.2 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1994.059.001
Not for sale with this lot

filled with chatty and intimate details, and signed off with “Yours, Mom,” or “Love to Fred and yourself / Be good, affectionately yours, / M.E. Carr.”⁸

Just before leaving Victoria, Hembroff had rendered Carr a singular service, raising money from civic organizations and individuals to buy a significant painting by Carr for presentation to the Provincial Archives.⁹ Her purpose was not only to gain formal acknowledgement of Carr’s work but also to enable her, since she could barely scrape by financially, to attend the world’s fair in Chicago, where she longed to see the large exhibition of international modern art. In response, Carr had made Edythe her first gift of a painting, choosing it because its title, *Joy*, expressed her response to Edythe’s act.¹⁰

Edythe and Fred would continue as champions of Carr’s work in Vancouver, arranging three shows that featured her work in the library at UBC, until finally the Vancouver Art Gallery took up the baton and gave her a series of solo shows from 1936 on. On Hembroff’s frequent visits to her family base in Victoria, she regularly visited Carr at her studio or at her sketching camps in the Metchosin area. A painting Hembroff made using a 1936 photograph records her memory of one of those visits, with Carr positioned in the doorway like a presiding deity while a modest young Edythe stands at her feet (figures 4 and 5).¹¹

It would have been around this time that Emily gave Edythe the painting *Old and New Forest*. The work is a summation of the flowing landscape style that Carr perfected from sketches made at Metchosin in 1934–1935, such as *Young and Old Trees* (1935, collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre). She had first formulated this new method in April 1934: “Now it seems to me the first thing to seize on in your layout is the direction of your main movement, the sweep of the whole thing as a unit.... It sways and ripples. It may be slow or fast but it is only one movement sweeping out into space but always keeping going—rocks, sea, sky, one continuous movement.”¹² In *Old and New Forest*, Carr achieves just such a movement, tying together the forms of individual trees, foreground terrain and background forest through a succession of echoing reciprocal curves. Ever the teacher, Carr perhaps selected this painting for Edythe to demonstrate the success of her method. But perhaps some more personal associations also motivated the gift.

We have noted that the motif of young and old trees emerged at the time when Carr and Hembroff were sketching together, and that Carr had insisted that the reluctant Edythe paint trees. From Carr’s journals we know that she tended to anthropomorphize trees. In June of 1934, sketching from her camper van, she described the stately older growth of the forest behind her, and the contrasting

other wood, just across the way... different in type. It has been liberally logged and few giants are left, but there are lots of little frivolous pines, very bright and green as to tips. The wind passes over them gaily, ruffling their merry, fluffy tops and sticking out petticoats. The little pines are very feminine and they are always on the swirl and dance in May and June. They snuggle in among the big young matrons, sassing their dignity, for they are very straight and self-respecting, but the youngsters always tip and peep this way or that.¹³

Old and New Forest shows just such a collection of little pines in front of the sheltering embrace of a dark forest and framed by more mature trees. At the right side, a tree with a curvaceous red trunk leans into the picture, tossing swirls of sunlit foliage. Although Carr had frequently singled out arbutus trees around Victoria in her early works, none appear in Carr’s Metchosin sketches. Could Carr have included this arbutus, which seems to be sidling out of the picture, as a reference to Edythe, her perennially youthful and roaming friend?

The motif of the swirling, dancing tree calls to mind an incident early in the two artists’ relationship. In 1931, Hembroff had been visited by a fellow student from her art school days and the two decided to paint each other’s portraits. In her memoir, Hembroff described the event:

As we were young and frivolous, we decided to pose in our best Paris evening gowns.... I sat down on the edge of the couch. Alas! Marian’s painting materials had been carelessly laid down there and I sat right on her palette!...

On my next visit to Emily, I told her about the catastrophe. She was unsympathetic, even gleeful. “That will teach you a lesson. You vain young things think only of appearances. You want to paint candy-box portraits.... Get your sketchbook and work from nature, which is the greatest teacher of all. André L’Hôte [*sic*] called you ‘La Petite Sauvage’ because you came from Canada. Well, show that you *are* from Canada and proud of it.”¹⁴

Even if Carr did not have such a precisely specific reference in mind when she painted *Old and New Forest*, her gift would have resonated for Edythe with memories of a long and important alliance.

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. During the time of her closest contact with Emily Carr, Edythe’s last name was her family name, Hembroff. She took the name Edythe Brand after her marriage in 1934, and the name Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher after her remarriage in 1942.
2. For descriptions of her first meeting with Carr, whom she found warm and friendly, as well as the complexities of their relationship, see Hembroff-Schleicher’s books *M.E.: A Portrayal of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1969), 1–11, and *Emily Carr: The Untold Story* (Saanichton, BC: Hancock House, 1978), 11–21.
3. Carr was invited to present a solo show of 32 works at the Seattle Art Institute in 1930, and after her participation in the National Gallery of Canada 1927 exhibition *Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern*, she was regularly included in the exhibitions of the Ontario Society of Artists and the Group of Seven.
4. Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, 1966), 24–25.
5. See, for example, *Old and New Forest*, circa 1931–32; *The Little Pine*, 1931; and *Sea Drift at the Edge of the Forest*, circa 1931–32, reproduced in Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, in assoc. with Douglas & McIntyre, 1979), 102.



TOP: FIGURE 4: **EDYTHE HEMBROFF-SCHLEICHER**
Self-Portrait with Emily Carr

Not for sale with this lot



BOTTOM: FIGURE 5: Emily Carr in her caravan, July 2, 1936
Photo: Helen Hembroff-Ruch
Royal BC Museum & Archives, D-03842

6. Carr to Nan Cheyney, December 14, 1931, in *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr to Nan Cheyney and Humphrey Toms*, ed. Doreen Walker (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), 10.
7. Hembroff-Schleicher, *M.E.*, 43–44.
8. *Ibid.*, 82, 84 and 94.
9. Carr’s oil painting *Kispiox Village*, 1912, is in the Royal BC Museum and Archives, PDPO634.
10. Hembroff-Schleicher, *M.E.*, 52–53.
11. Hembroff refers to this time when she visited Emily together with her sisters Helen and Ruth in her book *Emily Carr*, 134.
12. Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 106–7.
13. *Ibid.*, 130.
14. Hembroff-Schleicher, *M.E.*, 12–13.

ESTIMATE: \$250,000 – 350,000