



218 James Wilson Morrice

CAC RCA 1865 – 1924

Le pont

oil on canvas, signed and on verso inscribed *Morrice / Effet* (crossed out) *Le Pont / à M. Durio / 1310 / 3856E* on the exhibition label and on the frame *2505* (crossed out) / *8856* and stamped indistinctly, 1907
23 ½ x 28 ⅞ in, 59.7 x 73.3 cm

PROVENANCE

Julio Francisco Domingo de Arteche y Villabaso, 1st Count of Arteche, acquired in Paris circa 1930
By descent to the present Private Collection, Spain

LITERATURE

Catalogue des Ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Dessin, Gravure, Architecture et Art décoratif exposés au Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Société du Salon d'Automne, 1907, listed page 151
Marius and Ary Leblond, *Peintres de Races*, Société des Éditions de l'Art, Brussels, 1909, Morrice section pages 197–206, titled as *Le Pont de Charenton*, reproduced facing page 198

EXHIBITED

Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, *Salon d'Automne*, October 1–22, 1907, catalogue #1310

FROM THE 1907 SALON D'AUTOMNE TO A CENTURY IN ONE FAMILY

JAMES WILSON MORRICE occupies a central position in the history of Canadian art. Based in Paris for much of his career, he absorbed the cosmopolitan spirit of the French capital and introduced modern art to a generation of Canadian painters. He was a member of some of the most important artistic circles of the day—his friendships with Henri Matisse, John Singer Sargent, and the poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire are well documented—yet he retained a distinct, independent voice. *Le pont*, painted in 1907 and exhibited that same year at the *Salon d'Automne*, is a masterful example of Morrice's ability to capture the rhythms of urban life through a modern lens.

The subject is quintessentially Parisian. A stone bridge spans the Seine, its solid form anchoring the composition, while figures stroll along the riverbank in leisurely fashion. A barge, moored under the arch, suggests the hum of working life beneath the surface of Parisian elegance. Morrice combines these elements with remarkable economy of means: blocks of colour define the bridge, water and sky, while the dappled brushwork in the trees and figures enlivens the surface. The balance of compositional solidity and painterly freedom is characteristic of his finest works from this period.

The *Salon d'Automne* was the most progressive Paris *Salon* at the time. Founded in 1903, it quickly became the stage for the most innovative artists of the day, including the Fauves, Paul Cézanne and the young Pablo Picasso. Morrice first exhibited there in 1905, and his repeated inclusion underscores his acceptance within the Parisian avant-garde. The 1907 catalogue lists four works by Morrice, with *Le pont* designated as entry #1310.



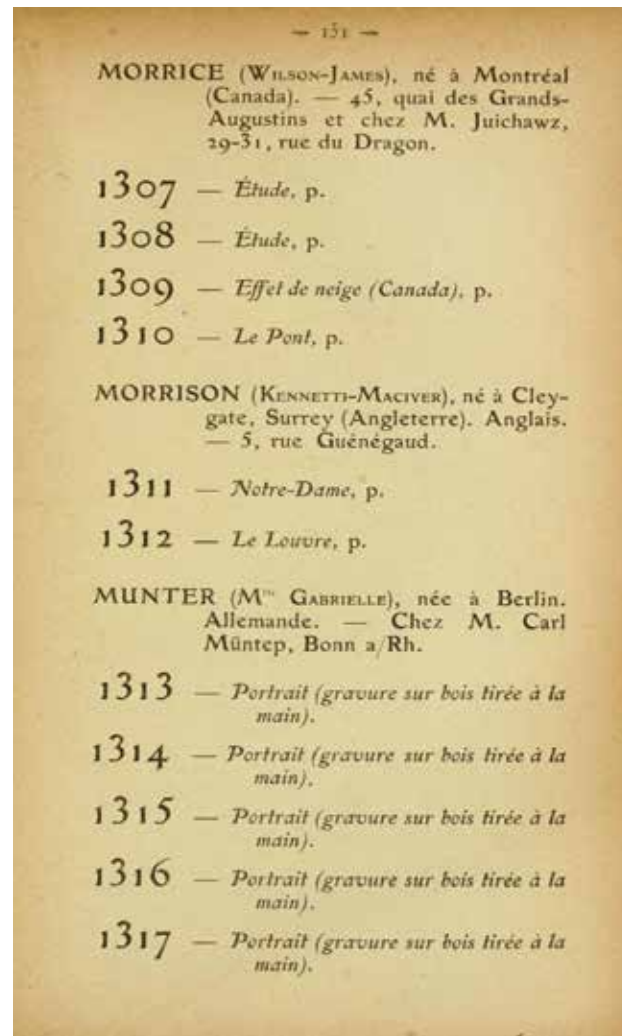
labels on verso

The exhibition history is further documented by the original frame, which still bears two important period labels. At the top of the frame is the original handwritten exhibition label, inscribed “Morrice – Le Pont,” with the catalogue number 1310 from the 1907 *Salon d'Automne*. The same label also bears the word *Effet*, which has been crossed out—most probably a reference to Morrice's other submission to the *Salon* that year, *Effet de neige (Canada)*, #1309. On the right side of the frame is a shipping label from Pottier, Emballeur de Tableaux & Objets d'art, 14 Rue Gaillon, Paris, printed with the word *Exposition*. Pottier was one of the leading packers and shippers of artworks in Paris, widely used by artists, dealers and institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Together, these original labels highlight the work's exhibition history.

After being acquired in Paris circa 1930, *Le pont* was admired and enjoyed for decades in the collection of Julio Francisco Domingo de Arteche y Villabaso (1878–1960). Julio, the 1st Count of Arteche, was a Bilbao banker and president of Banco de Bilbao. Beyond finance, he engaged in cultural life, serving on museum boards, supporting heritage projects, commissioning portraits and fostering intellectual circles, linking his social influence with artistic patronage and preservation.



Cover of the *Salon d'Automne* catalogue, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, 1907



Exhibition listing of the *Salon d'Automne* catalogue, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, 1907



Adding a more personal dimension to the work's history, the painting's original ornate frame, which was originally gilded, was painted white by the family's mother, from whose estate the work descends. This anecdote, passed down with the painting, connects the work not only to its Parisian origins but also to its long custodianship within the same family collection.

Stylistically, *Le pont* reveals Morrice's sensitivity to both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. His restricted palette of greens, ochres and blues reflects his preference for subtle harmonies. Unlike the exuberant colourism of Henri Matisse, Morrice's modernism was tempered, refined, and suffused with a sense of quiet poetry. Critics of the time often remarked upon his restraint, noting how he distilled the bustle of Paris into meditative, atmospheric scenes. This canvas exemplifies that tendency: although the subject is animated by figures and boats, the prevailing mood is one of stillness, beneath the arching bridge.

Le pont also marks an important moment in Morrice's career. By 1907, he had achieved recognition in Europe while continuing

to act as a vital conduit for Canadian art. His participation in the *Salon d'Automne* affirmed his place in the French art world and also expanded the visibility of Canadian painting on an international stage. For Canadian audiences, works like *Le pont* introduced the vocabulary of Post-Impressionist modernism, influencing contemporaries such as Maurice Cullen, Clarence Gagnon, and later, members of the Group of Seven.

In this canvas, Morrice achieves a synthesis that defines his finest work: the modernity of Paris filtered through a sensibility that is at once international and profoundly personal. The bridge becomes both subject and metaphor, linking the traditions of Impressionism with the innovations of twentieth-century modernism, and connecting the Canadian painter to the artistic currents of the wider world. Exhibited at one of the most important avant-garde salons of the early twentieth century, and descending within a single family collection, this is a landmark work within Morrice's oeuvre.

REPRODUCED IN *PEINTRES DE RACES* (1909)

WHEN MARIUS AND Ary Leblond published *Peintres de Races* in Brussels in 1909, their aim was to chart the spirit of modern painting through a series of artist monographs. The volume gathered leading figures of the day—Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Maurice Denis, Charles Cottet, Lucien Simon, among others—each presented as exemplars of the new art. Morrice's inclusion demonstrates the esteem in which he was held in Paris and affirms his place within the international avant-garde.

The authors praised qualities still admired today: a painter of calm and atmosphere, whose modernity was understated rather than flamboyant. They emphasized his delicate harmonies, his gift for transforming bustle into reverie, and his instinct for poetic suggestion. To them, Morrice was both cosmopolitan and personal, with Paris, Venice and Canada all appearing in his work, expressed through a sensibility attuned to balance and mood.

Our painting was among those reproduced in *Peintres de Races*. Exhibited at the *Salon d'Automne* in 1907 as *Le pont*, it appeared

in the book as *Le Pont de Charenton*. The title variation points to Charenton-le-Pont, a historic suburb southeast of Paris where the Marne flows into the Seine and where Morrice painted on several occasions. Its bridge, a long-standing gateway into the city, was a favoured subject for painters and provided the motif Morrice transformed into a study of structure and atmosphere.

Placed alongside Gauguin's Tahitian canvases, Van Gogh's portraits and Denis's Nabi compositions, Morrice is not a peripheral Canadian but part of the European avant-garde. This dual recognition—first at the *Salon d'Automne* and then in *Peintres de Races*—confirms his stature in his own time as a painter of international importance.

We thank Charles C. Hill, former Curator of Canadian Art (1980–2014) at the National Gallery of Canada and author of *Morrice, A Gift to the Nation: The G. Blair Laing Collection* (1992), for his assistance with researching this lot.

ESTIMATE: \$600,000 – 800,000