



111 Arthur Lismer

AAM CGP CSGA CSPWC G7 OSA RCA 1885 – 1969

The Departure of the Troop Ship, Halifax

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled and titled *Departure of the Troopship* on the Dalhousie Art Gallery label, dated 1916 – 1917, inscribed *No. 6 / \$55.00 / Bedford, N.S.* and variously on the backing and stamped with the Arthur Lismer Estate stamp and stamped signature
12 x 16 in, 30.5 x 40.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert W.M. Manuge, Halifax
Sold sale of *Important Canadian Art*, Sotheby's Canada, May 27, 1985, lot 740
Collection of Chris Haney, Toronto, circa 1985
By descent to the present Private Collection, California

LITERATURE

Gemey Kelly, *Arthur Lismer: Nova Scotia, 1916 – 1919*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1982, titled as *Departure of the Troopship*, reproduced page 51
Anabelle Kienle Poňka, *Halifax Harbour 1918 / Le port d'Halifax 1918*, National Gallery of Canada, 2018, page 34

EXHIBITED

Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, *Arthur Lismer: Nova Scotia, 1916 – 1919*, December 2, 1982 – October 2, 1983, catalogue #34

IN 1916, ARTHUR LISMER left Toronto to take up the position of principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia. When he arrived, he found that the port of Halifax was fully engaged in the war effort for World War I. Home to the Canadian Navy, the port had links to Canada's railway system,

and it was a key naval base from which supply ships, hospital ships and troops were deployed to England, France and Belgium. Troopships arrived from as far away as Australia and New Zealand, and also later from the United States.

On their arrival, the Lismer's settled in a house in Bedford, 10 miles from Halifax. From here Lismer was able to observe the drama of the wartime port in Bedford Basin, which provided a natural shelter for military vessels that were being formed into convoys, waiting to cross the Atlantic accompanied by armed battleships. He also sketched from the Halifax docks and went out on the minesweepers and tugs.

At the start of his time in Halifax, Lismer painted around Bedford and the Sackville River, but when he began to sketch the military activities around the harbour, it resulted in his arrest as a possible spy—a blow to this nationalistic Group of Seven artist! A local newspaper protested about landscape painters accessing the docks, resulting in Lismer frequently being reported on. However, the artist persisted, because, as he related in a December 6, 1917 letter to Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery of Canada, "Halifax is intensely interesting just now to a painter." In June 1918, the Canadian War Records Office asked Lismer to execute studies of Halifax's wartime activities, which resulted in the artist finally obtaining official permits for sketching.

This painting depicts a troopship painted with dazzle camouflage, which was invented by British marine artist Norman Wilkinson. Pablo Picasso is noted as claiming that the work of the Cubists provided inspiration for the patterning. These dazzle patterns of curved and zigzag lines were designed to mislead German U-boats and submarines when they were searching to destroy the Allied ships. The varied patterns helped to conceal the identity and the movements of Allied ships, and served to draw German fire away from propulsion systems and ammunition stores at their centres. Not only was dazzle camouflage a brilliant experiment that prevented loss of ships and lives; these wild patterns also looked stunning.

The Departure of the Troop Ship, Halifax is a dynamic composition. The central ship, covered by its dazzle paint, commands the eye. It steams out of the harbour guided by a tug, its departure observed by troops on shore. The water, milky green streaked by darker green and the white of the ship's foaming wake, provides an almost tropical contrast to the blue and grey hues of the dazzle patterns. Lismer captures the misty atmosphere of the day in the background, in shades of blue-grey that place the focus on the ship and the dock in the mid- and foreground. Lismer's documentation of wartime Halifax represents a unique chapter in Canadian history and art history; he produced extraordinary and striking works of art, of which *The Departure of the Troop Ship, Halifax* is a brilliant example.

One of the previous owners of this work, Chris Haney (1950 – 2010), was a dynamic Canadian who was a journalist and the co-creator of the popular board game Trivial Pursuit. Haney was working as a photo editor in Montreal when he met sports journalist Scott Abbott in 1975; together they developed the idea for



ARTHUR LISMER
Olympic with Returned Soldiers
oil on canvas, 1919
48 1/4 x 64 1/4 in, 123 x 163.3 cm
Collection of the Canadian War Museum,
Beaverbrook Collection of War Art,
CWM 19710261-0343

Not for sale with this lot

Painted for the Canadian War Records Office, *Olympic with Returned Soldiers* is Lismer's homage to the return of 5,000 troops to Halifax after the armistice was signed. Lismer considered the ship's homecoming a momentous event and described it as "a magnificent sight."

the trivia game in 1979, initially hoping to make enough money to travel. The game would become a worldwide pop culture success, with total sales of over 100 million in 26 countries, and it was produced in 17 languages. In the 1980s, Trivial Pursuit out-sold Monopoly.

Haney was a passionate Canadian, and the artworks from his collection, such as this and lots 112, 113 and 114 in this sale, represent his admiration for his country. These works were all likely acquired in the 1980s and remained in his family after his passing in 2010. Haney was a man of many interests who had a great passion for life. He built two successful golf courses in Ontario and enjoyed sailing, travel to Spain, wineries, photography, cooking, rounds of karaoke, reading the paper every morning, and above all, spending time with his family and friends.

ESTIMATE: \$60,000 – 80,000