



105 James Edward Hervey (J.E.H.) MacDonald

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA 1873 – 1932

The Lonely North

oil on paperboard, initialed J.M. and dated 1912 and on verso inscribed *Dr. MacC*, 20 and indistinctly
6 x 8 in, 15.2 x 20.3 cm

PROVENANCE

Dr. James M. MacCallum, Toronto
A gift to his great-nephew, Glenholme Lloyd Macdougall, Calgary
Bequest to a Private Collection, Alberta, 1998
By descent to the present Private Collection, Alberta

LITERATURE

Ontario Society of Artists 41st Annual Exhibition, Art Museum of Toronto, the related 1913 canvas titled *The Lonely North* reproduced, unpaginated
Pictures & Sculptures Given by Canadian Artists in Aid of the Patriotic Fund, Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, 1914, the related canvas reproduced, unpaginated

E.R. Hunter, *J.E.H. MacDonald: A Biography & Catalogue of His Work*, 1940, pages 14 – 15 and 48, and the related canvas reproduced plate 3

Nancy E. Robertson, *J.E.H. MacDonald, R.C.A., 1873 – 1932*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1965, the related canvas reproduced, unpaginated

Paul Duval, *The Tangled Garden*, 1976, pages 34 – 37 and 45 – 47, the related canvas reproduced page 66

Sarah Fillmore, *Canadian Pioneers: Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, J.W. Morrice, and the Group of Seven—Masterworks from the Sobey Collections*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2012, the related canvas reproduced page 85 and listed page 128

Sarah Milroy, editor, *Generations: The Sobey Family & Canadian Art*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 2022, the related canvas reproduced pages 124 – 125 and listed page 211

Kate Helwig and Alison Douglas, *J.E.H. MacDonald Up Close: The Artist's Materials and Techniques*, 2023, MacDonald's sketches from 1911 to 1913 discussed pages 53 – 55

LIKE HIS FELLOW artists who in 1920 would form the Group of Seven, J.E.H. MacDonald had a working practice that relied on oil

sketches painted in front of the motif. His larger canvases were worked up from these studies, occasionally enhanced by drawings, in his Toronto studio. The original oil sketches for most of MacDonald's canvases have been identified, but the discovery of this oil sketch is a revelation. Given by Dr. James MacCallum to his great-nephew in Calgary, this sketch was not included in any of the exhibitions to which MacCallum loaned his paintings, nor did it form part of his bequest to the National Gallery of Canada.

From this unpublished and unexhibited 1912 oil sketch, in the spring of 1913, MacDonald painted his magnificent canvas *The Lonely North* (figure 1). MacDonald priced that painting at \$350 when exhibited with the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in Winnipeg in January 1914, and he generously donated that canvas to the Patriotic Fund exhibition organized by the academy in December 1914. Shown in cities from Halifax to Winnipeg, at the end of the tour it sold at auction for \$60 to Mrs. H.E. McVicar of Toronto. In 1934, it was acquired by Mrs. Mabel Wilkinson, sister of Norman Gurd, the key figure in the formation of a public collection of contemporary Canadian art in Sarnia in the 1920s. The canvas most recently was included in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection exhibition *Generations*, highlighting the impressive art collection assembled by the Sobey family of Stellarton, NS.

The year 1912 was a key one in MacDonald's career. He had worked as a graphic designer since 1890, and it was only in 1908 that he began to paint with any consistency, most subjects being sketched in High Park or on the Humber River, near his home in west Toronto. The changing effects of light and weather were already a constant preoccupation. An exhibition of his paintings at Toronto's Arts and Letters Club in December 1911 was highly praised in the club's publication *The Lamps* and led to his meeting Lawren Harris's friend MacCallum, who invited MacDonald to spend time at his recently constructed cottage at Go Home Bay, on Georgian Bay.

MacCallum, an ophthalmologist, had spent his youth at Collingwood and begun teaching at the University of Toronto in 1890. In 1898, he joined a group of university professors who had established the Madawaska Club on Georgian Bay, though MacCallum only built his cottage, off Monument Channel on Go Home Bay, outside the club's perimeters, in the summer of 1911.

In the spring of 1912, MacDonald painted on the Magnetawan River, east of Georgian Bay, near Burks Falls, the home of his wife Joan's aunt. Around July 12, MacDonald and Joan and their 11-year-old son, Thoreau, arrived at Georgian Bay and stayed in MacCallum's houseboat moored at Split Rock Island, across from MacCallum's island. From Thoreau's journal we know they left for Toronto around August 5, after exploring the various islands around Go Home Bay in a rowboat during their three-week stay. MacCallum was obviously pleased with the resultant paintings, since he acquired five oil sketches (including this sketch for *The Lonely North*), of varying dimensions, and one Georgian Bay canvas for his own collection.

Most of MacDonald's 1912 paintings of Georgian Bay are characterized by low horizons, thin silhouettes of rocky islands and vast expanses of sky. Yet the principal subjects of *The Lonely North* and a closely related canvas, *The Log Pickers, Georgian Bay* (Museum London), are not low-lying islands but dramatic, stormy



FIGURE 1: JAMES EDWARD HERVEY (J.E.H.) MACDONALD
The Lonely North
oil on canvas, 1913
30 1/2 x 40 1/4 in, 77.5 x 102.2 cm
Empire Company Ltd., Stellarton, NS
Not for sale with this lot

skies. Despite its similarity to MacDonald's oil sketch *Saw-Mill, Lake Cecebe* (1912, National Gallery of Canada, acc. no. 4741, bequest of Dr. James MacCallum, 1944), painted earlier that year on the Magnetawan River, these are not Magnetawan River subjects but Go Home Bay landscapes, as identified by E.R. Hunter, who worked closely with Thoreau MacDonald in preparing his 1940 biography of MacDonald, and by Nancy Robertson in 1965.

The dramatic sky effects caused by storms traveling rapidly over the open water entranced MacDonald, as evidenced by his drawings of thunder clouds on Georgian Bay (Agnes Etherington Arts Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, #0-186, and Art Gallery of Hamilton, #55.106), one of which he exhibited as a study for an etching at the Canadian National Exhibition in late August 1912.

This sketch for *The Lonely North* is an outstanding work. With fluid brush-strokes, MacDonald astutely observed the dramatic movement of the storm cloud that casts darker shadows near the shore, contrasting with the lighter foreground water and sky upper left. E.R. Hunter correctly identified the related 1913 canvas *The Lonely North* as the finest of MacDonald's paintings of the weather, writing, "The clear, bright colours of this canvas convey admirably the true feeling of the North country."

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada and author of *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation*, for contributing the above essay.

This work is accompanied by a letter of provenance from the consignors.

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 – 50,000