



118 Frederick Horsman Varley

ARCA G7 OSA 1881 – 1969

Bridge Over Lynn

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled,
dated 1935 and 1936 on the exhibition labels
and inscribed with the Varley inventory #167
32 x 40 in, 81.3 x 101.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired directly from the Artist by H.S. Southam
A wedding gift from the above to his daughter, Margaret
Brinckman, London and then Ottawa, 1937
Galerie Dresdnere, Toronto
Private Collection, Toronto
Canadian Art, Joyner Fine Art, May 15, 1990, lot 32
Acquired from the above by the present Private Collection,
Vancouver

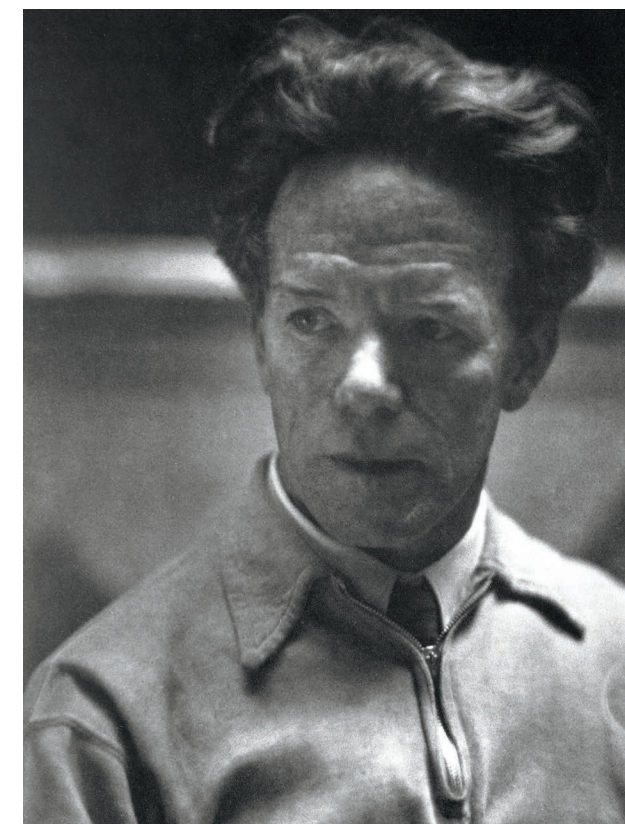
LITERATURE

F.H. Varley: Paintings, 1915 – 1954, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1954,
listed page 28
Megan Bice and Sharyn Udall, *The Informing Spirit: Art of the
American Southwest and West Coast Canada, 1925 – 1945*,
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1994, reproduced
page 151 and listed page 174
Catharine M. Mastin et al., *The Group of Seven in Western Canada*,
Glenbow Museum, 2002, reproduced page 70 and listed
page 200

EXHIBITED

Royal British Colonial Society of Artists, London, *Exhibition of
Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture by Artists of the British Empire
Overseas*, May 8 – 29, 1937, catalogue #19
Art Gallery of Toronto, *F.H. Varley: Paintings, 1915 – 1954*,
October – November 1954, traveling in 1954 – 1955 to the
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Montreal Museum of
Fine Arts; and a Western Tour, catalogue #23
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Paintings in Ottawa
Collections*, April 10 – May 6, 1959
Willistead Art Gallery of Windsor, *F.H. Varley Retrospective 1964*,
April 12 – May 17, 1964, catalogue #29
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, *The Informing
Spirit: Art of the American Southwest and West Coast Canada,
1925 – 1945*, January 30 – April 17, 1994, traveling in 1994 –
1995 to the Vancouver Art Gallery, Colorado Springs Fine
Arts Center and Gibbes Museum of Art, South Carolina,
catalogue #65
Glenbow Museum, Calgary, *The Group of Seven in Western Can-
ada*, July 13 – October 14, 2002, traveling in 2002 – 2004 to the
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of
Greater Victoria and National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa,
catalogue #86
Vancouver Art Gallery, extended loan, accession #E.L.92.2.3

FREDERICK HORSMAN VARLEY, born in Sheffield, England,
began his art training there in 1892, at the age of 11. Following
artistic training in Sheffield from 1892 to 1899, Varley enrolled at
the Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp, where he studied
from 1900 to 1902. Upon his return to England, he worked as

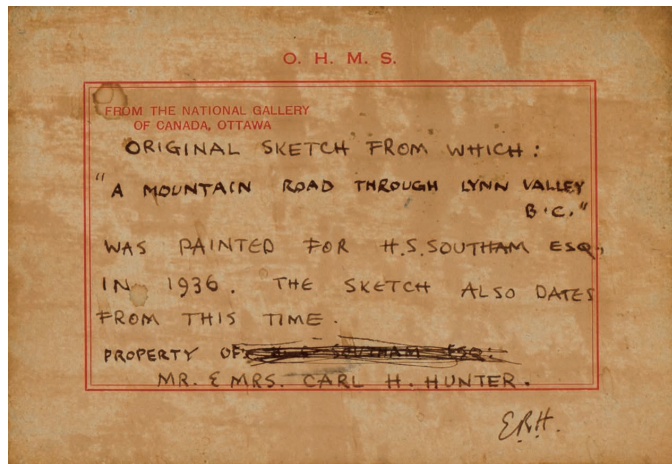


Included in The Varley Inventory
Number 167 Date MAY 7/69
Please notify the National Gallery of Canada in case of
change of ownership or address.

TOP: Frederick Varley, 1932
Photo: John Vanderpant

MIDDLE: FIGURE 1: Installation view of the Canadian Section of the exhibition *Artists of the British Empire Overseas*, London, May 1937, with *Bridge over Lynn* indicated

BOTTOM: label on verso of lot 118



TOP: FIGURE 2: **FREDERICK HORSMAN VARLEY**
A Mountain Road through Lynn Valley, BC
 oil on silk on board
 12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm
 Private Collection

Not for sale with this lot

BOTTOM: FIGURE 3: label on verso of the sketch *A Mountain Road through Lynn Valley, BC*

a commercial illustrator until his immigration to Canada in July 1912. He settled in Toronto and worked at design firms Grip Ltd. and Rous & Mann. He joined Toronto's Arts and Letters Club in November 1912. Following service as an official war artist, he joined the Group of Seven, showing in their first exhibition in 1920. Appointed as a teacher at the Ontario College of Art, Toronto, in 1925, Varley decided to accept a position at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts the following year and moved to British Columbia in the fall of 1926.

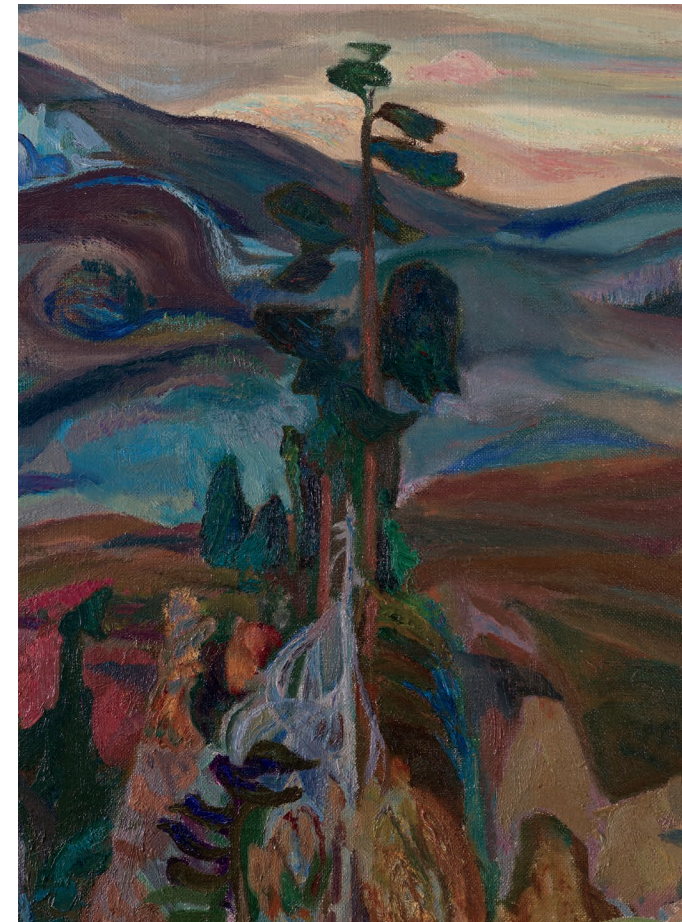
The move to BC was critical to Varley's evolution as an artist. Although landscape subjects had been an important part of his painting while he lived in Toronto, the landscape became his principal subject in Vancouver. Varley was astonished by the province's coastal geography. He wrote:

British Columbia is heaven. It trembles within me and pains me with its wonder as when a child I first awakened to the song of the earth at home. Only the hills are bigger, the torrents are bigger. The sea is here, and the sky is as vast; and humans—little bits of mind—would clamber up rocky slopes, creep in and out of mountain passes, fish in the streams, build little hermit cabins in sheltered places, curl up in sleeping bags and sleep under the stars.¹

Varley, and his student Vera Weatherbie, began an in-depth exploration of Lynn Valley, on the north shore of Burrard Inlet, in the early 1930s. He moved there in 1934, and the dramatic scenery of the area was his primary subject matter for the next two years.

Bridge Over Lynn, from 1936, might be described as the summation of his experience living on the North Shore. Our canvas is based on a related sketch, *A Mountain Road through Lynn Valley, BC* (figure 2) also from 1936 (see verso label, figure 3). Living in Lynn Valley, Varley was deeply moved by this setting, particularly the richness of the forest and the snow-capped mountains, which dominate the background of the painting. *Bridge Over Lynn* is a complex composition that demonstrates Varley's enormous skill through his bold depiction of the landscape. The expansive scene is viewed from above, likely from the porch of his cabin in Lynn Valley. The foreground is carefully considered, with strong elements of vegetation, but only some of that vegetation is delineated. The trees on either side of the bridge and the people on the bridge itself provide visual richness but without close definition. The tallest of the trees, to the left of the bridge, provides an important visual link between the foreground and background of the painting. The viewer is therefore given a deep sense of space but is not overwhelmed by detail.

The foreground vegetation is strikingly contrasted with the relative simplicity of the mountain forms that loom in the background. The snow-capped peaks on the left are carefully delineated, some in sunlight, others in shadow. Varley astutely provides enough definition of form to allow us to appreciate the beauty of this view without being caught up in minutiae. The sky above the mountains is richly varied and brighter above the less defined mountain forms on the right, allowing a greater depth of field.



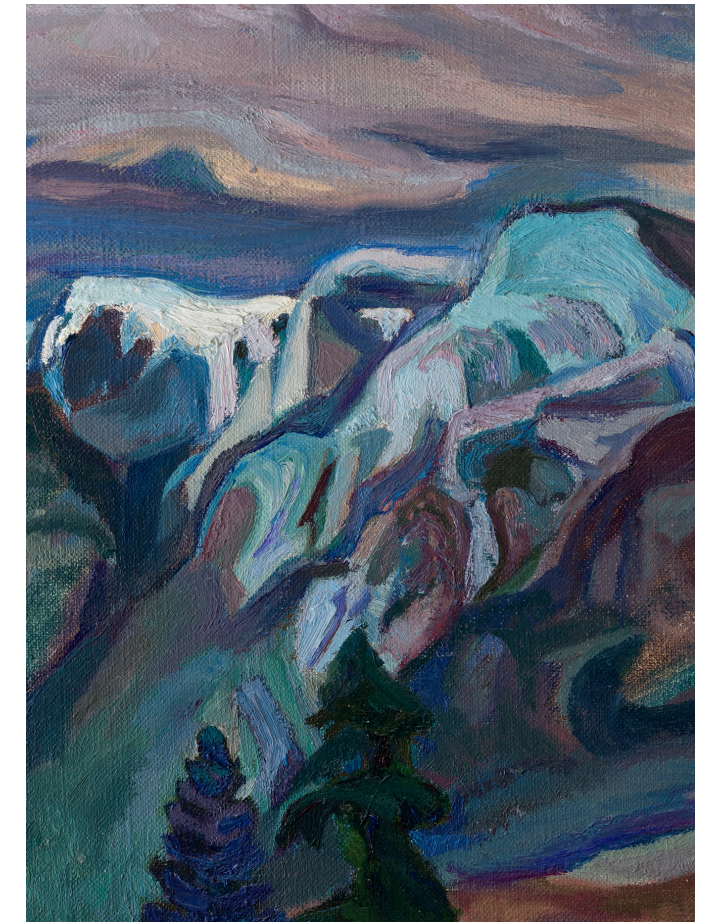
detail of lot 118

Bridge Over Lynn is clearly an image about the majesty rather than the specifics of nature. Varley, however, remains closely attuned to the forms and colours of his composition. Close and looser definition of the landscape gives the painting a subtle, but decided, visual rhythm. As our eyes explore this remarkable image, we begin to appreciate both our own relationship to the natural world and the spirit of this vast country.

We thank Ian M. Thom, Senior Curator—Historical at the Vancouver Art Gallery from 1988 to 2018, for contributing the above essay.

1. Letter quoted in Christopher Varley, *F.H. Varley: A Centennial Exhibition* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1981), exhibition catalogue, 110.

BRIDGE OVER LYNN was acquired directly from the artist in 1936 or 1937 by H.S. Southam (1875–1954). Southam was a Canadian newspaper publisher and the chairman and member of the board of trustees of the National Gallery of Canada from



detail of lot 118

1929 to 1953. Shortly after completion, *Bridge Over Lynn* was one of three works by Varley submitted to the jury for the *Artists of the British Empire Overseas* exhibition in 1937. Only one Varley was included in the exhibition (figure 1), our painting *Bridge Over Lynn*. Following the exhibition in London, the painting was gifted to Southam's daughter, Margaret Brinckman, who was living in London at the time, on the occasion of her wedding in 1937. *Bridge Over Lynn* has been exhibited extensively, most recently on long-term loan at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

We thank Charles H. 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 his assistance with researching this lot.

ESTIMATE: \$800,000 – 1,200,000