



210 Thomas John (Tom) Thomson

OSA 1877 – 1917

Winter Morning

oil on panel, stamped with the estate stamp and on verso signed, titled, dated *Spring 1915* in Dr. J.M. MacCallum's hand, inscribed *Not for sale* in Lawren Harris's hand, *No. 152, Mrs. Harkness* and variously and stamped with the estate stamp, spring 1915
8 7/16 x 10 1/2 in, 21.4 x 26.7 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist
Elizabeth Thomson Harkness, sister of the Artist,
Owen Sound
R.A. Laidlaw, Toronto
Libby's Art Gallery, Toronto
Private Collection, Toronto
Canadian Art, Joyner / Waddington's, November 24, 2009,
lot 75
The Collection of Torben V. Kristiansen, Vancouver

LITERATURE

Joan Murray, *A Treasury of Tom Thomson* (limited edition of 15),
2011, reproduced front cover
Joan Murray, *A Treasury of Tom Thomson*, 2011, discussed
page 40, reproduced page 28 (also verso of work) and page 41
Ian A.C. DeJardin and Sarah Milroy, editors, *Tom Thomson:
North Star*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 2023,
reproduced page 222 and listed page 267

EXHIBITED

Art Gallery of Toronto, *Sketches on Exhibition at the Art Gallery
of Toronto*, October – November 1949, catalogue #42
Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, *Private Collectors'
Choice in Canadian Art*, sponsored by the Canadian
Cancer Society, August 1959
Galerie Eric Klinkhoff, Montreal, *Collectors' Treasures: Annual
Loan Exhibition*, October 19 – November 2, 2019, catalogue #50
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, *Tom Thomson:
North Star*, June 24, 2023 – January 14, 2024, traveling in 2024
to the Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, and the Audain Art
Museum, Whistler



Installation views of *Tom Thomson: North Star*, Audain Art Museum, Whistler, BC,
2024, with *Winter Morning* indicated



TOM THOMSON'S *WINTER MORNING* is a remarkable evocation of a wintry world. Heavy snow lies on the ground and trees. It is early morning, as indicated by the touches of yellow in the patches of visible sky and the very slight yellow on some of the tree branches. In the work, Thomson used blues, greys and whites picked out by deeper blue to create a sense of quietude and enchantment. The viewer feels instinctively that the scene must have been almost entirely silent.

Thomson's love of colour served as his inspiration. By reflecting light, snow offers rich and changing possibilities of hue, like a prism. He probably had been encouraged by Lawren Harris in painting snow. Harris, together with J.E.H. MacDonald, head of the design section, Thomson's section, at Grip Ltd., had seen an exhibition titled *Contemporary Scandinavian Art* in 1913 at the Albright Art Gallery (now the Buffalo AKG Art Museum). Paintings of snow by Gustaf Fjaestad and others featured in the show.¹ Harris and MacDonald would have shared their excitement over their discoveries with Thomson.

For Thomson and others, snow was already a theme that spoke of the nation. Canada was often called at the time "Our Lady of the Snows." The phrase was derived from an 1897 poem by Rudyard Kipling, one of the poets Thomson loved and liked to read.

Thomson arrived in Algonquin Park in mid-March 1915 when snow was deep on the ground. On April 28, he guided a fishing party and had to stop painting for a time. The sketch would have been done between these two dates, though likely in March when the snow was still heavy. *Winter Morning* makes it clear that he loved the subject of snow and the colours it takes on in the light. He returned to the subject in the fall of 1916 to paint several sketches and a major canvas, *Snow in October* (collection of the National Gallery of Canada, accession #4722).

Thomson knew this sketch was good. Although he did not sign his sketches as a rule, he signed and titled this one on the back. Dr. J.M. MacCallum, friend and patron of Thomson and the Group of Seven, dated it. Harris, ever watchful over Thomson's work, endorsed it by adding on the back "Not for sale." He underlined the words and added "Laidlaw," meaning that the sketch had been reserved for friends, the brothers Walter and Robert A. Laidlaw, wealthy businessmen and sons of the founder of the R. Laidlaw Lumber Company.

The brothers loved the painting as they loved all of Thomson's sketches, and although they sometimes owned Thomson's sketches jointly, Robert loved it so much that he bought it. He became in time one of the most generous donors of Thomson works, making gifts of sketches to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, the Art Gallery of Alberta, and Upper Canada College in Toronto. Culture, health care and education were his major concerns as a philanthropist, and in 1949, he and his family founded the Laidlaw Foundation, which continues his good work.

Torben V. Kristiansen bought *Winter Morning* at auction in 2009. It became one of the favourites in his collection, so much so that he arranged for it to be used as a cover for a special edition of a book titled *A Treasury of Tom Thomson* (2011). Only 15 copies of this edition were printed, reserved for Kristiansen's closest friends among his clients, but as in the regular edition of the book, the writer discussed the sketch and reproduced the inscriptions on the back. Today, *Winter Morning* appears again in



TOP: verso of lot 210

LEFT: detail of lot 210

the monumental Thomson show and catalogue by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, *Tom Thomson: North Star*, which pays tribute to Thomson's art in the oil sketch format (always a favourite).

That catalogue reproduces Thomson's many sketches of snow in 1915 and 1916. The later works are perhaps more clearly structured than *Winter Morning*, but there is something exuberant about this sketch that speaks well of Thomson's excitement over the subject. He wrote his father in April 1917 from Algonquin Park that he expected to get a lot more winter sketches before the ice and snow were gone.² Sadly enough, he never saw another winter. He died in the summer of 1917.

We thank Joan Murray, former curator of Canadian art and chief curator (1972) at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for contributing the above essay. Murray helped to bring the paintings of Tom Thomson to world attention through a series of exhibitions and seven books, including a biography (the most recent is *A Treasury of Tom Thomson*). Murray is the author of the *Tom Thomson Catalogue Raisonné*.

This work is included in the Tom Thomson catalogue raisonné, researched and written by Murray, as catalogue #1915.05: <https://www.tomthomsoncatalogue.org/catalogue/entry.php?id=284>.

1. A photocopy of J.E.H. MacDonald's marked copy of the catalogue is in the Edward P. Taylor Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

2. Tom Thomson to his father, April 16, 1917, Tom Thomson Papers, MG30 D284, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Quoted in Joan Murray, "Tom Thomson's Letters," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), 303.

ESTIMATE: \$1,000,000 – 1,500,000