



114 Efa Prudence Heward

BHG CAS CGP 1896 – 1947

Sunflowers

oil on canvas, initialed and on verso signed, titled, dated 1936 and inscribed variously
34 ¼ x 36 in, 87 x 91.4 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist
By descent within the family of the Artist, Montreal

LITERATURE

Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward, 1896 – 1947, National Gallery of Canada, 1948, listed page 11
Retrospective Exhibition: Prudence Heward, Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, 1980, listed, unpaginated
Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986, listed
Retrospective Exhibition: The Beaver Hall Group, Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, 1999, listed, unpaginated
The Beaver Hall Group: A Fundraising Exhibition, Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, 2007, listed, unpaginated

EXHIBITED

Empire Exhibition, *Canadian Painting*, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, 1936 – 1939
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward, 1896 – 1947*, March 4 – 29, 1948, traveling in 1948 to the Art Association of Montreal, catalogue #11
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, Montreal, *Retrospective Exhibition: Prudence Heward*, September 1980, catalogue #48
Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward*, March 1 – April 27, 1986, traveling to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, catalogue #30
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, Montreal, *Retrospective Exhibition: The Beaver Hall Group*, September 1999, catalogue #50
Galerie Walter Klinkhoff, Montreal, *The Beaver Hall Group: A Fundraising Exhibition*, April 2007, catalogue #77

IN HER SPEECH at the opening of Prudence Heward’s memorial exhibition on May 13, 1948, Anne Savage (1896 – 1971) remarked: “Not since the days of J.W. Morrice has any native Montrealer brought such distinction to her native city, and never has such a contribution been made by a woman.”¹ Efa Prudence Heward (1896 – 1947) is best known for her paintings of women, such as *Girl on a Hill* (1928, National Gallery of Canada), which won first prize at the Willingdon Art Competition in 1929. Amongst her many paintings are Heward’s portrayals of Black girls and women. These include *Dark Girl* (1935, Hart House, University of Toronto), *Sunflowers* (1936), *Hester* (1937, Agnes Etherington Art Centre), *Clytie* (1938, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa), and *Girl in the Window* (1941, Art Gallery of Windsor).² There is another painting of a Black girl with a flower held by her face (n.d.), in the collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery. *Sunflowers* is the last of Heward’s major paintings depicting the Black female subject to exit a private collection.

In 1919, after spending two years working for the Red Cross in London during the First World War, Heward returned to Montreal and trained under William Brymner at the Art Association of



Studio portrait of Prudence Heward, circa 1927
Courtesy of the family of Efa Prudence Heward

Montreal. She later took private lessons with Randolph Hewton. Because Heward had her own studio in her family home on Peel Street, she was not an official member of the Beaver Hall Group, which formed in 1920 and shared studio space at 305 Beaver Hall Hill.³ Nonetheless, she was famously close friends with several members of the group including Mabel Lockerby, whom Heward immortalized in two paintings: *Miss Lockerby* (circa 1924, Power Corporation of Canada Art Collection) and *At the Café (Miss Mabel Lockerby)* (circa 1929, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts). Heward was respected and often beloved by her colleagues in both Montreal and Toronto. In a 1932 article in the *Montreal Gazette*, a journalist described her as “an adopted daughter of the Group of Seven,” because she had exhibited with them three times.⁴ A.Y. Jackson was particularly supportive of Heward, and with members of the Group, Heward co-founded the Canadian Group of Painters in 1933. She was also a founding member of the Contemporary Arts Society in 1939.

After winning the Women’s Art Society Prize for painting in 1924, when she was a student in the advanced class at the Art Association of Montreal, Heward returned to Europe, studying in Paris at the Académie Colarossi under Charles Gérin and at



PRUDENCE HEWARD
Dark Girl
 oil on canvas, 1935
 36 x 40 in, 92 x 102 cm
 Hart House Collection, University of Toronto

Not for sale with this lot

the *École de beaux-arts* with Bernard Naudin. While in Paris she became familiar with European modernism, including Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Art Deco. This awareness of European avant-garde styles is evident in Heward's use of bold, unnatural colour such as the acid-pink apron in her well-regarded portrait *Rollande* (1929, National Gallery of Canada) and her use of visible, expressive brush-strokes in many of her paintings of the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

In a letter dated February 1, 1930, Jackson wrote to painter Isabel McLaughlin: "I think she [Heward] and [Edwin] Holgate are the strongest painters in Montreal."⁵ The letter was intended as encouragement for McLaughlin to meet Heward in Europe, where she had returned once again in 1929. McLaughlin and Heward became close friends, traveling to Bermuda together for the first time in 1936, the same year that Heward painting *Sunflowers*.⁶ Heward had painted her first depiction of a Black woman in 1935 with *Dark Girl*, which was exhibited several times during Heward's life, including at the Canadian Group of Painters show in 1936, where it was listed for \$900, and in the *Century of Canadian Art* exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London in 1938.⁷

Given the date of *Dark Girl*, the model for the painting was almost certainly a Black woman living in Montreal. Art historian Charmaine Nelson has observed that Heward likely hired Black women who were working either as domestics or as professional models at art schools and community centres in Montreal.⁸ During her time in Bermuda in 1936, Heward sketched, and may have painted, Black female models. For instance, she produced a preparatory sketch (*Study of a Black Nude*) in or around 1936.⁹ Notably, there are preparatory sketches on the verso of *Sunflowers*.

Pencil lines create the impression of an oval head, neck, torso and two left arms: one bent at the elbow with the hand hidden behind the head, and one laid flat in front of the torso. A right arm crosses the torso, and the "hand" is placed upon the inside of the elbow of the straightened arm. While the long oval face is not unlike the young Black woman's face in *Sunflowers*, the arms are dissimilar from the pose in the finished painting.

Although Heward's first painting of a Black woman was produced in 1935, she owned a copy of George Bernard Shaw's 1932 book *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*, which includes illustrations by English wood-engraver John Farleigh. It is not clear when Heward became aware of Shaw's book, whether in 1932 or thereafter, but it is noteworthy that in Farleigh's images, the Black female protagonist is depicted naked with a long, lithe body and small breasts. Heward depicts her subject with a similar body type, although in Heward's painting the young woman is thinner, with visible ribs. The subject is centred between two sunflower stalks, which she holds onto with her two raised hands; her fingers are long and elegant. Her large, almond-shaped eyes gaze off to the left side of the canvas, which is common in Heward's representations of women. Her black hair appears to be braided, and it is pinned up on the sides of her head. Light strikes her chest and forearms, almost like a camera flash. The young woman's body demonstrates Heward's widely recognized skill in realistically modeling her human subjects.

In the same 1932 article in the *Montreal Gazette*, the journalist writes that "in her portraits [Heward] never allows the setting to become just a background, but it is always an integral part of the picture."¹⁰ This is certainly true for *Sunflowers*. The subject is close to the picture plane, and she is unquestionably the primary focus, but she is quite clearly emmeshed with the sunflowers and the dark green foliage that surrounds her on all sides. Her face, shoulders and torso are framed by what appears to be a rust-coloured, furrowed field. Fields of this particular shade are frequently visible in photographs of Bermuda, suggesting that the painting was indeed produced in, or at least inspired by, Bermuda.

Heward preferred the term "figures" to "portraits" when describing her depictions of human subjects, and while it is probable that *Sunflowers* depicts one specific person, the model is not named, which was fairly typical for Heward's figurative paintings. Only some of her white and Black female subjects are named, and even then, the models are usually identified by only their first or last name. Without the name of the woman who modeled for *Sunflowers*, then, it is possible to read the painting as not only a portrait but also as a symbolic or allegorical image. The significance of the sunflowers is apparent, given the title of the work and the fact that the young Black woman is framed by two sunflowers. Heward's painting anticipates by seven years surrealist painter Dorothea Tanning's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (A Little Night Music) of 1943, which portrays two young girls alongside a monstrous sunflower.

Although in Tanning's work the sunflower suggests something threatening, generally sunflowers are regarded in Western culture as symbols of loyalty, adoration, hope, warmth, positivity and strength as well as strong bonds and lasting happiness. These symbols sprang from the Greek myth of the water nymph Clytie and Apollo, the sun god, in which Clytie was in love with Apollo, who spurned her. Despite his rejection, Clytie continued to watch Apollo cross the sky, never taking her eyes off of him, and

eventually she was turned into a sunflower, whose face continued to follow the sun.¹¹ It is possible, then, to view Heward's subject in *Sunflowers* as perhaps a sun deity or, alternatively, as a young woman associated with symbols of hope, light and warmth.

Interestingly, in light of the myth that created sunflower symbolism, Heward painted a young Black girl two years after creating *Sunflowers*. *Clytie* (1938, Robert McLaughlin Gallery) depicts its subject wearing a pink dress with a blue bow, standing against a stone wall, which separates her from the pink building in the background. She wears white gloves, and her hands are crossed politely in front of her. Both of her white socks, but especially the right one, are starting to bunch around her ankles. Combined with her serious facial expression, this gives the young girl a sense of vulnerability and pathos. It has long been assumed that the girl's name was actually Clytie, given the title, and this may well be the case, but considered in dialogue with the sunflower symbolism in the 1936 painting, it is worth considering whether this title was intended to be symbolic rather than eponymous. Like *Dark Girl*, *Clytie* has been exhibited several times, including at the 1939 Art Association of Montreal spring exhibition and the 1939 Canadian Group of Painters show, where it was listed for \$450.¹²

Heward's ability to paint decreased in 1945 due to her severe asthma. She died in Los Angeles in 1947, and the following year a memorial exhibition, which included 102 of her works, was displayed at the National Gallery of Canada from March 4 until March 29. The exhibition then toured other cities in Canada from April 2, 1948, until August 31, 1949. Prior to the memorial exhibition, *Sunflowers* was included in the *Canadian Painting* section of the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg and other locations in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand (1936–1939).¹³ Since Heward's death in 1947, *Sunflowers* has been in the collection of the Heward family.

We thank Julia Skelly, author of *Prudence Heward: Life & Work* (Art Canada Institute), for contributing the above essay. Skelly received a PhD from Queen's University, and she teaches in the Department of Art History at Concordia University.

1. "Address of Miss Savage at Opening of Memorial Exhibition," May 13, 1948, typescript, Canadian Women Artists History Initiative Archives, Concordia University, Montreal.
2. The date for *Sunflowers* is sometimes identified as circa 1936, but the date is given confidently as 1936 in the catalogue for the National Gallery's memorial exhibition for Heward in 1948. *Sunflowers* is catalogue #11. *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward, 1896–1947* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1948), exhibition catalogue, 11.
3. Kristina Huneault, " 'As Well as Men': The Gendering of Beaver Hall," in *1920s Modernism in Montreal: The Beaver Hall Group*, ed. Jacques Des Rochers and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2015), exhibition catalogue, 263–92.
4. "Prudence Heward Shows Paintings," *Montreal Gazette*, April 27, 1932
5. Isabel McLaughlin Archives, 2303.37/10/26, Queen's University, Kingston.
6. Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986), 65.
7. Charles C. Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), 122.



PRUDENCE HEWARD
Clytie
 oil on canvas, 1938
 40 x 26 in, 101.8 x 66.6 cm
 Collection of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa

Not for sale with this lot

8. Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.
9. Julia Skelly, "Key Works: Hester 1937," in *Prudence Heward: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2015), <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/prudence-heward/key-works/hester/>.
10. "Prudence Heward Shows Paintings."
11. See "Clytie," Smithsonian American Art Museum, <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/clytie-20026>. The story of Clytie and Apollo is mostly known from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (AD 8).
12. Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties*, 122.
13. *Ibid.*

ESTIMATE: \$250,000 – 350,000