210 **Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson**

ALC CGP G7 OSA RCA RSA 1882 – 1974

Souvenir of Kispayaks

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled
on the gallery labels, circa 1942
21 ¼ × 32 ¼ in, 54 × 81.9 cm

PROVENANCE

Dominion Gallery, Montreal
Private Collection, Montreal
Laing Galleries, Toronto
Private Collection, Montreal, 2010
Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Marius Barbeau, *The Downfall of Temlaham*, 1928, the related canvas *Kispayaks Village* listed page xi and reproduced page 70
Walter Klinkhoff, *A.Y. Jackson Retrospective Exhibition*, Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., 1990, dated as 1943, listed, unpaginated

EXHIBITED

Galerie Walter Klinkhoff Inc., Montreal, *A.Y. Jackson Retrospective Exhibition*, September 10 – 22, 1990, catalogue #21

THE GRACEFUL CONTOURS of a snow-capped mountain peak rise above crest poles crowned by avian figures in this lyrical picture of the Gitxsan village of Kispiox. Its scenic landforms and solemn potlatch houses alike showcase artist A.Y. Jackson's rhythmic handling of colour and pigment. *Souvenir of Kispayaks* belongs to a pivotal series in Jackson's output documenting his participation in an epochal chapter in Canadian and Indigenous art histories. In 1926, Jackson visited Gitxsan territory at the invitation of renowned ethnologist Marius Barbeau, for whom the journey was the culmination of several ambitious projects.[1] *Souvenir of Kispayaks* is believed to be among the very last large-scale works in private hands resulting from this voyage up the Skeena River.

While traveling with Jackson and future Group of Seven member Edwin Holgate, Barbeau was in the process of collecting Gitxsan stories that would inform both a scholarly monograph on the family histories and titles memorialized by the region's stunning crest poles, *Totem Poles of the Gitksan* (1929), as well as a novel that freely adapted those narratives into an original hybrid of historical fiction and folklore, *The Downfall of Temlaham* (1928).[2] To illustrate Barbeau's novel, both Jackson and Holgate supplied original artworks inspired by their encounters with Gitxsan material culture. Jackson's picture of the downriver village of Gitsegukla displays striking compositional similarities to *Souvenir of Kispayaks*. In both pictures, dynamic groupings of crest poles soar above wooden structures set against majestic backdrops of mountain and cloud.

Souvenir of Kispayaks is closely related to the earlier canvas *Kispayaks Village* (1926 – 1927), in the collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. The stirring rhythms of Jackson's Skeena canvases of the 1920s were greatly admired by the Victoria-born Emily Carr, who, after viewing examples of this series in the artist's Toronto studio, confided to her journal, "I felt a little as if

ALEXANDER YOUNG (A.Y.) JACKSON
Potlatch and Totem Poles in Kispiox on the Upper Skeena River, BC
graphite on paper, 1929
8 × 9 ⅞ in, 20.32 × 25.1 cm
© A.Y. Jackson / CARCC Ottawa 2025

Not for sale with this lot

beaten at my own game."[3] Carr may have had in mind her own canvas *Kispiox Village* (1912, in the collection of the Royal BC Museum and Archives), painted in the prismatic palette characteristic of the Fauvist works she completed upon returning to Canada following studies in France. It may well have been Jackson's treatment of this subject that inspired Carr to revisit it in *Kispiax (Kispiox) Village* (1929), a gem of the Art Gallery of Ontario's permanent collection. Through an astonishing coincidence, Carr was brought into the orbit of the Group of Seven through a tip from hereditary Tsimshian Chief William Beynon, Barbeau's interpreter while traveling in Gitxsan territory.[4]

Barbeau's Skeena River trip was also partly motivated by his plan to preserve historic crest poles that were coming to the end of their intended life cycle. Railways proved indispensable to this work in more ways than one: while Barbeau had negotiated free Canadian National Railway passes for Jackson and Holgate on the understanding that their artworks would help promote the region's tourist potential, he had also enlisted a CNR engineer, T.B. Campbell, to straighten and secure crest poles that had begun to tilt precariously. The dramatically angled poles in *Souvenir of Kispayaks* attest to Jackson's reservations about these conservationist measures, which, as documented by his autobiography, were at odds with the wishes of his Gitxsan informants.[5]

Diverging from Barbeau's aspirations could be risky business for his collaborators, however: art historian Leslie Dawn has documented how the American artist Langdon Kihn, who had accompanied the ethnologist on an earlier trip up the Skeena River in 1924, was slated to be the sole illustrator of *The Downfall*

ALEXANDER YOUNG (A.Y.) JACKSON
Kispayaks Village
oil on canvas, 1926 – 1927
25 × 31 in, 63.5 × 79 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Gift of David N. Ker, 1984.049.001

Gitxsan poles and houses in village of Kispiox, British Columbia, 1909
Photo: University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections

of Temlaham before becoming estranged from Barbeau over minor discrepancies in vision.[6] Jackson's knack for diplomacy successfully diffused possible frictions, as he jokingly suggested to Campbell that the CNR engineer secure leaning poles by setting them in concrete at the angles in which he found them.[7]

Jackson's wit aside, this episode reveals political undercurrents that continue to generate important conversations today. Beyond their tourist potential, Barbeau had hoped to promote Gitxsan crest poles as emblems of Canadian identity. Relatedly, in 1926 he was busy preparing a watershed exhibition of Canadian and Indigenous art co-organized by the National Gallery of Canada and the National Museum of Canada (the precursor to today's Canadian Museum of History, where Barbeau worked as an anthropologist). When it opened in 1927, the touring *Exhibition of West Coast Art: Native and Modern* presented masterworks by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr alongside a selection of Indigenous cultural belongings.[8] Barbeau's rationale for this unprecedented—and not soon to be repeated—multicultural statement was shaped by his recognition of Indigenous societies as the First Peoples of the lands now known as Canada.

Barbeau's decentring of settler cultures in *West Coast Art* came into conflict, however, with the more homogenous image of Canadian nationhood then in the process of being forged by NGC director Eric Brown.[9] But while the wilderness landscapes of the Group have been closely associated with Brown's agenda, paintings inspired by Barbeau's gambit to bring Group members and their associates into generative contact with the Indigenous arts of Western Canada, including Jackson's *Souvenir of Kispayaks*, reveal rifts within this tense force field of competing national visions—rifts that compel our attention today.

Particularly striking in this regard is Jackson's inclusion in *Souvenir of Kispayaks* of multiple groups of Indigenous figures attired in bright, Western-style clothing. At left, a pair of figures appears engaged in lively conversation, while a central grouping of three figures huddles around a campfire accompanied by a dog. The modernity, agency and centrality of these figures is at odds with prior readings of Jackson's Skeena works that allege a subordination of Indigenous figures to the landscape.[10] By contrast, the emphatic foregrounding of Indigenous subjects in *Souvenir of Kispayaks* is consistent with the humanistic gaze of Jackson's representations of Inuit life in the works that resulted from his travels to the Arctic with Dr. Frederick Banting in 1927, a trip that galvanized both men's humanitarian advocacy for Indigenous Peoples.[11]

With *Souvenir of Kispayaks*, Jackson fulfills Barbeau's ambition to forge a new type of Group of Seven picture, one attentive to the ethnologist's calls to recentre Indigenous arts, but at the same time resistant to the more idealizing currents of his conservation agenda. With an assured brush and bold palette, Jackson delivers an image of romantic sweep simultaneously animated by vivid details of everyday life, from mundane attire and weathered buildings to slanting crest poles. An artwork of national significance, *Souvenir of Kispayaks* is a vibrant ode to Gitxsan lifeways and lands.

We thank Adam Lauder for contributing the above essay. Lauder is an art historian based in Toronto and an adjunct professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design University.

1. See Leslie A. Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), chap. 8; Sandra Dyck, " 'A New Country for Canadian Art': Edwin Holgate and Marius Barbeau in Gitxsan Territory," in *Edwin Holgate* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), exhibition catalogue, 55–67.

2. See Marius Barbeau, *Totem Poles of the Gitksan, Upper Skeena River, British Columbia* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1929); Marius Barbeau, *The Downfall of Temlaham* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1928). See also Wayne Larsen, *A.Y. Jackson: The Life of a Landscape Painter* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009), 130.

3. Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 24. See also Joan Murray, essay in *Canadian, Impressionist, & Modern Art* (Vancouver: Heffel Fine Art Auction House, May 2025, lot 126), 68–69.

4. See Naomi Jackson Groves, *A.Y.'s Canada* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1968), 152.

5. See A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: An Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (1958; repr., Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1976), 110.

6. See Dawn, *National Visions*, chap. 6.

7. See Larsen, *A.Y. Jackson*, 131.

8. National Gallery of Canada, *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1927). See also Dawn, *National Visions*, chap. 9.

9. See Dawn, *National Visions*, 261.

10. For instance, Larsen reads the Indigenous figures in Jackson's *Indian Home* (1926), painted in Port Essington at the mouth of the Skeena River, as "part of the landscape—an indigenous people rooted to their environment." Larsen, *A.Y. Jackson*, 132.

11. See F.G. Banting, "With the Arctic Patrol," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 1, no. 1 (May 1930): 19–30; C.R. Greenaway, "Banting Regrets Hudson Bay Use of Eskimo," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 8, 1927, 1, 36; Jackson, *Painter's Country*, 121–22.

ESTIMATE: $600,000 – 800,000