



**110 Edward John (E.J.) Hughes**

BCSFA CGP OC RCA 1913 – 2007

**Entrance to Howe Sound**

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1949 and on verso titled, dated 1949 and inscribed LD [light damar varnish] MED March 25 1948/LD MED March 31 1948/LD+ZC [Zapon cellulose] THIN Oct 22 1948  
32 x 36 in, 81.3 x 91.4 cm

**PROVENANCE**

Mr. D.G. Hahn, Toronto  
Ronald MacDonald, Toronto  
Masters Gallery Ltd., Calgary  
Lillian Mayland McKimm Collection, Calgary  
then Vancouver Island

**LITERATURE**

*Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Arts*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1950, listed page 9  
Doris Shadbolt, *E.J. Hughes*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1967, reproduced, unpaginated  
Paul Duval, *High Realism in Canada*, 1974, reproduced page 113  
Jacques Barbeau, *The E.J. Hughes Album, Volume 1, The Paintings, 1932 – 1991*, 2011, dated as 1948, reproduced page 10 and listed page 90  
Robert Amos, *E.J. Hughes Paints British Columbia*, 2019, reproduced page 42

**EXHIBITED**

Arts Centre of Victoria, *Juried Exhibition*, 1949  
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Arts*, March 3 – April 16, 1950, catalogue #70  
Vancouver Art Gallery, *E.J. Hughes: A Retrospective Exhibition*, October 5 – 29, 1967, traveling to York University, Toronto, November 13 – December 8, 1967, catalogue #12

*ENTRANCE TO HOWE SOUND* marks a watershed moment in the career of E.J. Hughes. When Hughes returned from seven years' service as an official war artist for Canada, he received the Emily Carr Scholarship, but the turmoil of wartime had coloured his paintings with a darkness that persisted for some years. Even a holiday subject like that of the canvas *Qualicum Beach* (1948, collection of Hart House, University of Toronto) was overshadowed



**EDWARD JOHN (E.J.) HUGHES**

**Howe Sound**

graphite cartoon, circa 1937  
11 ½ x 15 in, 29.2 x 38.1 cm  
Sold by Heffel Fine Art Auction House, November 7, 1996, lot 149

Not for sale with this lot

with existential dread. But at last, with his next painting, our *Entrance to Howe Sound*, Hughes began to emerge into the light, his soul soothed by the balm of the forest and waters of his home territory.

The subject of Howe Sound had interested him for more than ten years. In about 1937, following his studies at the Vancouver School of Art, Hughes had taken a trip:

Orville Fisher's mother owned a guest house at Grantham's Landing, Howe Sound. [Paul] Goranson and I were visiting and the three of us [including Fisher] canoed to a nearby island to do some sketching. From there I made a pencil sketch of this small island. It was about 1937, just before I met my wife and before the San Francisco mural commission.



E.J. Hughes with *Entrance to Howe Sound* (1949) in the backyard at 1341 Vining Street, Victoria  
Photo: Fern Hughes

I spent a long time making a black and white cartoon, reworking the tree forms, and made much use of an eraser to help form some of the lighter shapes.<sup>1</sup>

The drawing, which he titled *Howe Sound*, was a fully realized pencil study, showing a forested island with rocky shoreline, similar in composition to Lawren Harris's *Island—MacCallum Lake* (1921).

Eleven years later, after seven years of military service, Hughes revisited the Howe Sound drawing. He was living with his wife Fern in a tiny house in Victoria's Fernwood neighbourhood and had just completed a momentous summer trip north on Vancouver Island, sponsored by the Emily Carr Scholarship. The artist was beginning the slow evolution towards something like a naturalism, which he pursued for the rest of his career.

In preparation for the new painting, Hughes created a densely worked graphite study of the composition which, despite its tiny size, includes every detail of the final oil. His repeated application of the graphite pencil is such that the paper has become

embossed and somewhat reflective. When he finished the study he drew a grid over it, which helped him to enlarge it on his final canvas.

Much had changed in the artist's life since those early days at Howe Sound. Using his new "primitive" manner he tilted the horizon, and the original impressionistic reflections on the calm water were replaced by stylized choppy waves. In place of the sunny day he painted a brooding sky, while the trees and beach on the near island are boldly illuminated. Doris Shadbolt identified the effect: "It is the faint disquiet we all experience in moments of revelation when familiar objects momentarily take on new dimensions of meaning; we cannot explain them but they can haunt us for a lifetime."<sup>2</sup>

Hughes added the narrative touch of a coastal steamship hurrying by in the middle distance and noted, "That boat was one of the Union steamships that stopped at small ports along the west coast of the mainland. Savary Island, where the Vancouver School of Art had their summer sketching camps, was among the stops of this boat. The boat is shown on its way to Gibsons Landing."<sup>3</sup> In

the distance on the left is a fishing boat like the ones Hughes had worked on at Rivers Inlet before the war.

Writing to his sister Zoe in the summer of 1949, Hughes let her in on his thoughts and methods:

I am still working and reworking my five or six pictures on hand. I know it is not the best thing for good painting, but it is the best thing for the paintings I am trying to make good at present. I am, and expect to be for a number of years, still groping and uncertain, hence rarely able to put down the right thing with the first coat of paint. On second thought, in one case at least, it is the best thing for painting. I mean in the work of Albert Ryder, the American who worked until his paint was one quarter of an inch thick and eventually deeply cracked, but whose work still steals the show in a roomful of paintings. I'm thinking of the Ryder in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.<sup>4</sup>

The influence of Ryder is certainly evident in *Entrance to Howe Sound*. "While doing the painting," Hughes explained, "I altered the forms slightly to get a more solid primitive effect." He continued: "There is a certain mannered formula to the foliage here that I developed for a while. It can also be seen in *Farm Near Courtenay, B.C.*"<sup>5</sup>

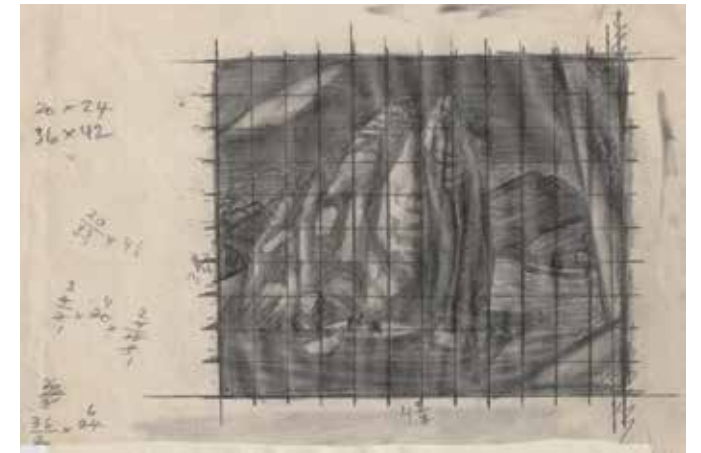
In 1949, the Arts Centre, a predecessor to the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, was renting a storefront on Broughton Street and held its first juried show there. Hughes was among a field of amateurs and, in an unsigned review for the *Victoria Colonist*, the writer, probably Audrey Johnson, noted that "textural quality and solidly modelled forms are stressed in an arresting oil canvas, *Entrance to Howe Sound*, by E.J. Hughes."<sup>6</sup>

*Entrance to Howe Sound* was not part of the original sale of paintings to Max Stern's Dominion Gallery that Hughes contracted on July 31, 1951. Pat Salmon records it as entering the collection of D.G. Hahn of Toronto, probably at an earlier date. It was loaned to the Art Gallery of Toronto for their *Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Arts* in 1950 and then to the Vancouver Art Gallery for the retrospective *E.J. Hughes* in 1967.

Though one of Hughes's most appealing and dramatic paintings, *Entrance to Howe Sound* has not been seen as often as his contemporaneous canvases that belong to public institutions. Except for its appearance in Paul Duval's book *High Realism in Canada*, it disappeared from sight for many years.

Yet the painting embodies much of what is best in Hughes's art. Robert Ayre, writing about the artist's first show in Montreal, put it brilliantly:

He not only looks at the Canadian scene but feels it, with passion, and puts it down note for note, leaf for leaf and wave for wave, with the love and concentration of a "primitive." I can well believe it takes him two months to paint a picture—I almost said carve, because some of these works look as if they have been carved out of linoleum. The result of his passion and labor is tremendous intensity. The familiar world of the West Coast—the sea and the shore, the boats and the



**EDWARD JOHN (E.J.) HUGHES**  
**Compositional Study for Entrance to Howe Sound**  
graphite on paper, 1948  
Special Collections, University of Victoria

Not for sale with this lot

houses and the trees of the forest—takes on the strangeness and solidity of the world in the afterlife.<sup>7</sup>

*Entrance to Howe Sound* was painted at a time when Hughes's future had not yet been secured by his contract with the Dominion Gallery and the artist put his utmost effort into this picture, striving to create something that would speak to the world in the most convincing visual language he knew. It was, in every way, a success.

We thank Robert Amos, artist and writer from Victoria, BC, for contributing the above essay. Amos is the official biographer of Hughes and has so far published five books on his work. Building on the archives of Hughes's friend Pat Salmon, Amos is at work on a catalogue raisonné of the artist's work.

1. Quoted in Pat Salmon, unpublished biography in the possession of the author.
2. Doris Shadbolt, "Ed Hughes—Painter of the West Coast," *Canadian Art Magazine*, Spring 1953, 100.
3. Quoted by Pat Salmon, unpublished biography.
4. E.J. Hughes to Zoe Foster, August 15, 1949, Special Collections, University of Victoria.
5. Quoted by Pat Salmon, unpublished biography. *Farm Near Courtenay, B.C.* (1949) is in the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery.
6. *Victoria Colonist*, November 23, 1949.
7. Robert Ayre, *Montreal Star*, October 27, 1951.

**ESTIMATE: \$1,250,000 – 1,750,000**