



φ 29 **Alexander Colville**

PC CC 1920 – 2013

**June Noon**

acrylic polymer emulsion on board, signed and dated 1963 and on verso signed, titled, dated and inscribed *Acrylic Polymer Emulsion and Panel of untempered masonite. Gesso of white pigments in acrylic polymer emulsion as are pigments for actual painting. Final protective coat of same emulsion. All materials from Permanent Pigments Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio.* 30 x 30 in, 76.2 x 76.2 cm

**PROVENANCE**

Banfer Gallery, New York  
 Donnelley Erdman, Colorado  
 Fischer Fine Art Ltd., London  
 The Langen Collection, Germany, 1970  
 By descent to the present Private Collection,  
 Germany

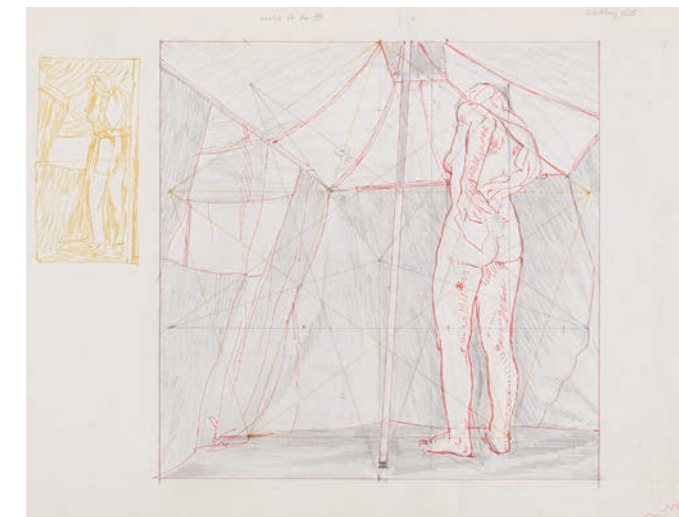
**LITERATURE**

*33<sup>a</sup> Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, Venezia, 18 Giugno – 16 Ottobre 1966*, Ente Autonomo La Biennale di Venezia, 1966, listed, titled as *Meriggio di giugno*, page 146  
 Robert Melville, *Alex Colville*, Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd., 1970, listed page 10 and reproduced page 21  
 Helen J. Dow, *The Art of Alex Colville*, 1972, reproduced page 178  
 David Burnett, *Colville*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983, reproduced page 217 and listed page 248, catalogue #69  
 David Burnett, *Alex Colville: Prints/Estampes*, 1985, reproduced page 11  
 Tom Smart, *Alex Colville: Return*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2003, reproduced page 119

**EXHIBITED**

*33<sup>rd</sup> Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia*, June 18 – October 16, 1966, catalogue #473  
 Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd., *Alex Colville*, January – February 1970, catalogue #10  
 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Alex Colville: A Retrospective*, July 22 – September 28, 1983, traveling in 1983 – 1984 to Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Berlin; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; and Vancouver Art Gallery, with *June Noon* shown only in Toronto, Cologne and Berlin, catalogue #27

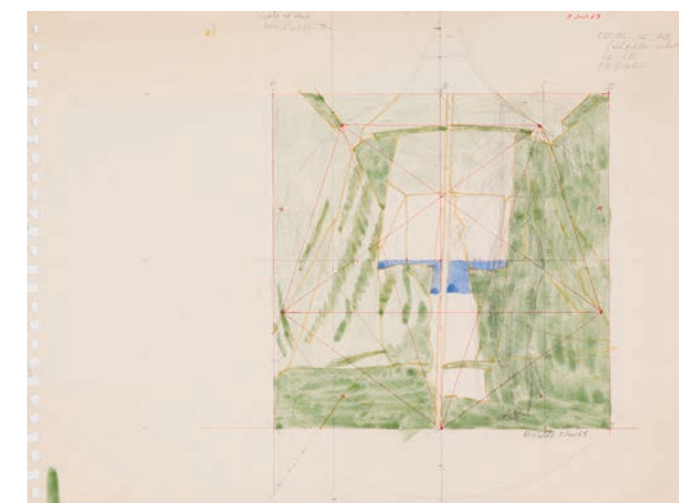
ALEX COLVILLE WAS a supremely thoughtful man and painter. We need the invitation to “slow looking” proclaimed by his images even more in our social media and AI world. *June Noon* is a superb and significant Colville painting, one that restores value to that overworked term “iconic.” One of the many reasons it stands out is its exhibition history. Shown in the world’s most prestigious contemporary art exhibit—the *33<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale* in 1966, in which Colville represented Canada alongside painter Yves Gaucher and sculptor Sorel Etrog—the work could not have been more prominent.



**ALEXANDER COLVILLE**  
**Study for June Noon (AC1014)**  
 ink and graphite on paper, 1963  
 10 3/4 x 13 3/4 in, 27.3 x 34.9 cm

This work is from *Alex Colville: Thinking, Making, Reflecting: A Selling Exhibition*, Heffel Gallery Limited, 2023, catalogue #84

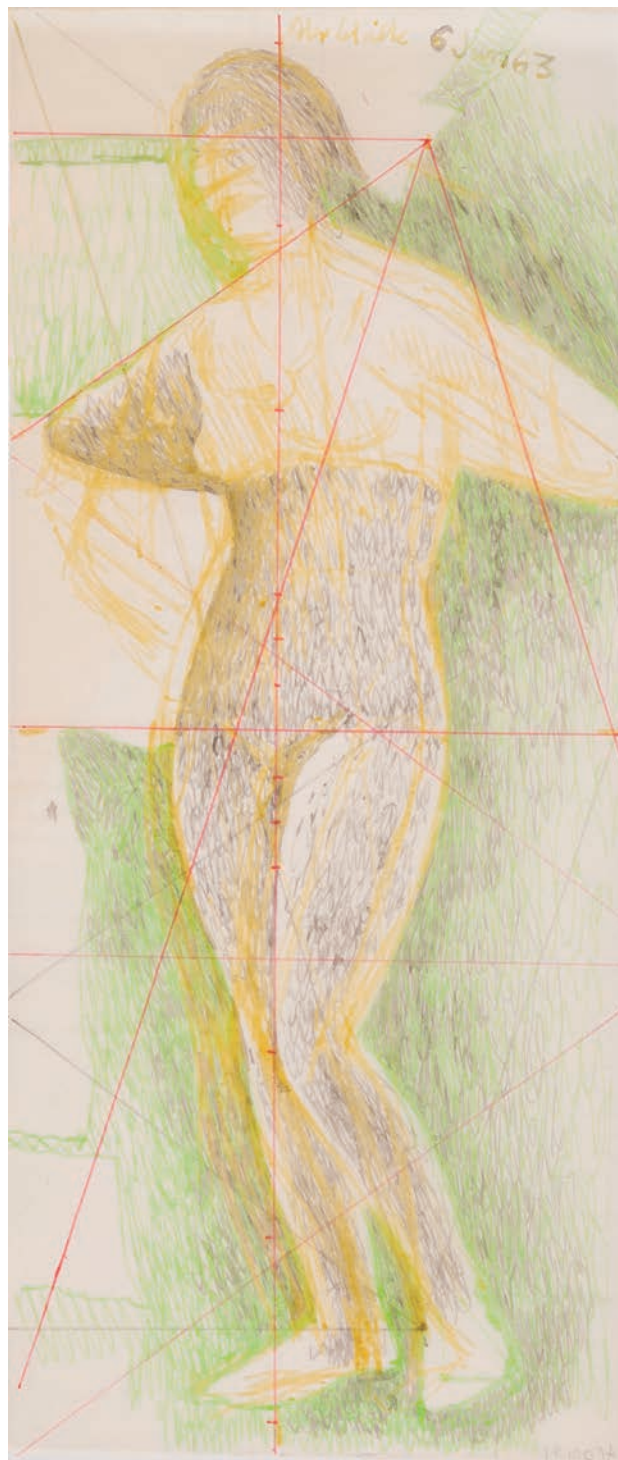
Not for sale with this lot



**ALEXANDER COLVILLE**  
**Study for June Noon (AC00167)**  
 ink, graphite and watercolour on paper, 1963  
 9 x 12 in, 22.9 x 30.5 cm

This work is from *Alex Colville: Thinking, Making, Reflecting: A Selling Exhibition*, Heffel Gallery Limited, 2023, catalogue #85

Not for sale with this lot



**ALEXANDER COLVILLE**  
**Study for June Noon, Figure (AC00171)**  
 ink on tracing paper, 1963  
 11 3/4 x 5 1/4 in, 29.8 x 13.3 cm

This work is from *Alex Colville: Thinking, Making, Reflecting: A Selling Exhibition*, Heffel Gallery Limited, 2023, catalogue #87

Not for sale with this lot

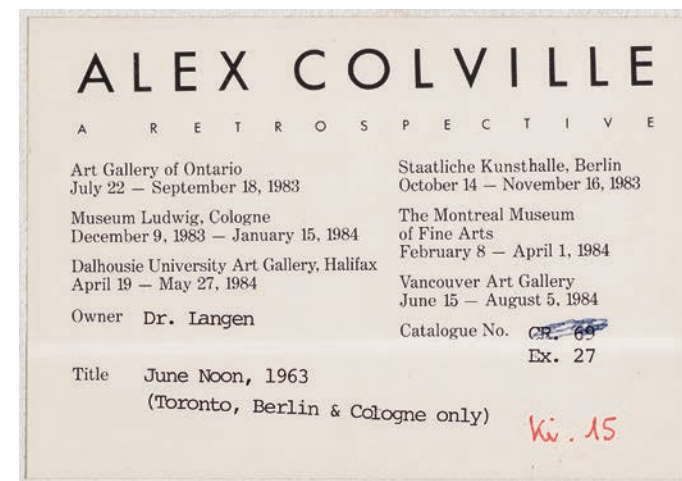
On the other hand, it has for decades been in a private collection, which, according to Colville, is the ideal place for its contemplation. In a 1967 interview, he mused that “Paintings are, in a sense, private works of art. I actually prefer a painting of mine to go into a private collection rather than a public one... Some person or small group of persons actually live with the painting [and] it becomes part of their life.”<sup>1</sup> *June Noon* has enjoyed both types of looking described by Colville: it has been reproduced in the literature on the artist and seen in exhibitions as important as the *Venice Biennale*, and it has received extended contemplation in its former home in Europe.

The contrast of private intimacy and public vision is a central theme of the work. The nude woman inside the tent—modeled as usual by Colville’s partner, Rhoda—sees herself as she dresses or undresses in relative privacy. Of course, we as viewers of the painting also see her. Why expose her in this way? Colville was an exponent of the long Western traditions of classical painting, including the female nude. He was an avid art history teacher in the Fine Arts Department at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, from 1946 until the year of this painting, 1963, when he left academe, not only to paint full time but also to have fewer administrative responsibilities and more autonomy. *June Noon* should be seen in company with the many other paintings of the female nude from the early part of his long career, including the much-acclaimed *Nude and Dummy* of 1950 and the variety of studies on this theme. Whatever one’s reaction to these and related images, it is worth recalling that Colville also turned his revealing gaze on himself (*Studio*, 2000).

Colville’s paintings often attract us because of their familiarity, whether they portray a domestic scene (*Refrigerator*, 1977, in which both Colvilles are in the nude), domesticated animals and pets, or well-known landscapes. But this is where the artist’s preference that people live with the painting and make it part of their lives comes in. In *June Noon*, we need time to contemplate the complexity of what he shows us.

We readily see that juxtapositions are characteristic of Colville’s method of constructing his complex and precise images and of his thinking in general. *June Noon* is a play of binaries: male/female (the former clothed, the latter nude); inside/outside; looking down and “inside” in the woman’s case versus the man (clearly Colville), who explores the world through binoculars; nature (grass, sand, water, sky) versus human technologies (the tent); light versus insight, because the bright outside contrasts with the subdued intimacy of the tent. Colville establishes these and additional formal and thematic relationships in the careful yet free-thinking studies for this painting. Crucially, though, his signature precision defeats overly simple readings of the work. For example, light from the outside, the male space, overlaps onto or intrudes into the entrance to the tent. The carefully slanted tent pole that divides the surface is at once reportage (tents require poles), a strong compositional device (a straight if angled line amidst the moored but loose fabric of the structure), and metaphorical. We see him work out its placement in *Study for June Noon (AC1014)*, catalogue #84 in Heffel’s 2023 sale *Alex Colville: Thinking, Making, Reflecting: A Selling Exhibition*. For Colville, the world and our human relationships require our close observation and are never simple.

The year 1963 brought several turning points in Colville’s life and professional career. Yet we should ask, how much biography



Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Alex Colville: A Retrospective*, 1983, exhibition label on verso



33rd Venice Biennale, 1966, exhibition label on verso

is germane to the understanding of a complex work such as *June Noon*? How much is too much and takes us away from a direct visual encounter? As noted, he left his long university career behind in this year. Like *June Noon*, the history is again more complex than conventions would suggest. Colville’s departure did not accord with the stereotype that artists become teachers to support their art and leave teaching to have more time. Of course, this does happen, but Colville was devoted to his role as a teacher of art history (less so to his studio teaching) and was a leader in the administration. He left mostly out of frustration in not being able to make the sorts of changes in higher education at Mount Allison that he envisioned. He did end up with more time for his art, but also with a precarious income. At this time, financial anxiety was multiplied by changing art dealers several times. And his mother died in August 1963.

If we know these details, we might be tempted to think that the man in *June Noon*, Colville himself, is not only looking at the seascape but also peering into his own future and that of his family (Rhoda and their four children). It is a highly confident painting created at an anxious time. Yet Colville’s faith in himself was fully warranted. National and international acclaim came simultaneously. On the heels of his triumph in Venice, he produced the enduringly loved Centennial coin set in 1967. He became an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1967 and received an honorary degree from Mount Allison University in 1968. Can we see this or the other biographical details in *June Noon*? No, not directly. But his achievements of the 1960s are nonetheless encapsulated in this painting.

We thank Mark A. Cheetham, author of *Alex Colville: The Observer Observed*, for contributing the above essay. He is a professor of art history at the University of Toronto and a freelance curator and art writer.

1. Quoted in “A Look Back at 50 Years of Canadian Artists at the Venice Biennale,” CBC Arts, April 21, 2022, para. 3 under “Alex Colville, 1966,” <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/a-look-back-at-50-years-of-canadian-artists-at-the-venice-biennale-1.6426341>.

**ESTIMATE: \$1,500,000 – 2,500,000**



33rd Venice Biennale catalogue cover, 1966

