

Emily Carr and Others at Victoria

Emily Carr and Those Around Her. An exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, July and August 1978

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[See table of contents](#)

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As traditional as afternoon tea in Victoria is the showing of Emily Carr's work each summer to appease the deluge of tourists. This year, however, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria used a different twist in exhibiting her work. They placed her in historical context, showing not only professionals but also amateurs who painted in British Columbia during and after her lifetime. Many have since been forgotten and their works are rarely seen; yet in their time, a number of these artists were more important to the growing art institutions in the province than was the eccentric and innovative Carr, about whom we hear so much today.

Exhibition organizer Robert Amos, Assistant to the Director at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, has drawn principally upon the Gallery's permanent collection. In choosing from among the hundreds of artists and thousands of works available there and elsewhere,

Amos reports that he had two themes in mind: forest interiors and shorelines. Although his selection of fifty-three works did not keep strictly to these themes, the majority of the paintings and drawings in the exhibition did deal with them. The forest and the sea have dominated the history of painting in British Columbia. This pattern may well have been detected by Maria Tippett, who in 1974 organized a show at Simon Fraser Gallery entitled *Contemporaries of Emily Carr in British Columbia*. With Douglas Cole she subsequently published *From Desolation to Splendour: Changing Perceptions of the British Columbia Landscape* (Toronto, 1977). Woods and ocean are recurring scenes in this study of the development of landscape painting in Canada's westernmost province.

Amos notes that the variety of artists represented in the show fall into different groups. With the amateurs the display ran the gamut from a 'Sunday sketcher's' notebook to more skilled work such as the watercolour (untitled landscape with trees) by Sarah Lindley Crease. Her daughter Josephine (Zeffie), whose watercolour *Summer Day, Olympics* was shown, was only seven years older than Emily Carr, but her art training and background were different, and she thus played a very different role in Victoria's art circles. Both are listed as having been founding members of the Island Arts Club (later the Island Arts and Crafts Society) in its first pamphlet of 1910. It was with this group that Emily Carr exhibited on several occasions, despite disdaining such amateurs. As for Josephine Crease, she was more than just an exhibitor of paintings: she was an organizer, a record-keeper, and often a member of the executive (as vice president, president, Art School Committee member, and eventually honorary president).

There were others in the show who were also involved in the activities of this first art organization in Victoria. Included were Samuel and Margaret Maclure (the one noted as an architect, the other as a musician), Margaret Kitto, Maude Lettice, and Will Menelaws. Also linked with the amateurs were W.J. Phillips, Bertram Berrick, and Arthur Gresham. A slightly



FIGURE 1. Ina D.D. Uhthoff, *Landscape*. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Photo: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria).

earlier figure was Josephine Woodward, who came from England at the turn of the century to visit her brother, horticulturist A.J. Woodward, and taught art in the growing capital city.

Some of the other artists in the show fall into the category of friends of Emily Carr, or at least as people who at one time or another communicated more closely with her. In this group Amos named C.J. Collings, Nan Lawson Cheney, and Statira Frame (in whose home Carr stayed in 1912 when she returned to Vancouver from France). Also included here were Max Maynard, Jack Shadbolt, and Ina D.D. Uthoff, who are noted for having joined with Carr to form a 'modern room' in the Island Arts and Crafts Society's annual exhibition of 1932.

Ina D.D. Uthoff came to Canada in the 1920s from Scotland, where she had received training in art at the Glasgow School of Art. She ran a school, taught art in Victoria, and also participated in the Little Centre of 1946, the forerunner of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. One of her two landscapes in the summer exhibit (Fig. 1) clearly reveals her tendency to follow more modern trends, although her subject matter suggests a link with more traditional members of the art community. She seems to have grasped a feeling for British Columbia's unique natural environment – wet, grey, yet also dynamic – which has influenced the personal expression of numerous artists who have lived in the province. Emily Carr was not alone.

In Vancouver numerous painters, many with distinctive traits to their work, appear also to have turned to what Amos called 'an awareness of essential form.' Depiction of each detail did not seem to be demanded by the environment as these artists saw it. Rather there is evident a feeling of a vibrant and alive world. In the exhibit a number of Vancouver-related artists were represented – Mildred Valley Thornton, W.P. Weston, Fred Amess, Bruno Bobak, Paul Goranson, E.J. Hughes, Vera Weatherbie (Mrs. H. Mortimer-Lamb), William D. West, Fred Varley, and Charles H. Scott.

When the Vancouver School of Applied and Decorative Art opened in 1925, Charles H. Scott was principal – a job that kept him very busy with teaching and administrative duties. Nonetheless, his painting developed from a more traditional approach reflecting his Scottish background to a new style and perception of the west coast landscape. *Gold and Blue Greys, Hornby Island* (Fig. 2) shows this change in his rendering of a



FIGURE 2. Charles H. Scott, *Gold and Blue Greys, Hornby Island*. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Photo: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria).

shoreline. A familiar theme and technique again emerge.

This mode for dealing with British Columbia's natural setting has not disappeared with the passing of Emily Carr and many who were around her. The summer exhibit also included works by contemporary Victoria artists – Nell Bradshaw, Millicent Shapiro, and Norman Locke – whose paintings and drawings all lent themselves to 'forest scenes with a tendency towards the totem.'

Although this is undoubtedly connected to a broader change in taste, Amos also sees elements that make up 'some form of indigenous art.' He has attempted to show what local developments in British Columbia have looked like, with the main value judgment that this is a worthwhile area for investigation.

On this last point there is probably increasing agreement. The University of Victoria's Maltwood Museum and Gallery and the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, as well as private lenders, helped to bring about the exhibition. Thus there is a network of collectors focusing on the area. Looking at our culture from several different angles seems to be an activity of importance, and exhibits like this are surely stepping-stones to further investigation.

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