



## 118 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

### North Shore, Lake Superior III (Lake Superior Sketch LXIX)

oil on board, signed and on verso signed, titled variously and inscribed with the Doris Mills inventory #4/69 / *not for sale* (crossed out) / *Lake Superior Sketch LXIX* on a label, circa 1926  
12 x 15 in, 30.5 x 38.1 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist  
Brownlee Walker Haydon, New York then Los Angeles  
By descent to the present Private Collection, Los Angeles

#### LITERATURE

Doris Mills, *L.S. Harris Inventory*, 1936, Lake Superior Sketches, Group 4, catalogue #69, listed, titled as *North Shore, Lake Superior III*, location noted as the Studio Building, a drawing of this work illustrated by Hans Jensen page 13

IN SEARCH OF new, distinctly Canadian landscapes to paint, Lawren Harris and the other members of the Group of Seven actively explored the country from their base in Toronto, collecting source material in the form of pencil and oil sketches for the grand canvases they would later develop in their studios.

As Harris honed his artistic ideas, he changed his subject matter and the destinations for his sketching trips. Since he organized the Group's collaborative ventures, the destinations reflected his own journey and continuous evolution, which seemed to be the most persistent of all the members. After the decorative and vibrant landscapes of Algoma (which Jackson described as "too opulent for Harris"),<sup>1</sup> he found himself gravitating to, and reveling in, the openness of Lake Superior, the heights of the Rockies and the serenity of the Arctic. All of these locations were important in Harris's major landscape period of the twenties, but Superior was his most frequent sketching ground, a place he visited on at least seven different trips between 1921 and 1928. Not only did he work there when he was at the height of his enthusiasm for representational painting, but this environment allowed him to push further the boundaries of his distinctive and unique vision for art. As so clearly demonstrated in this work, Harris was moving towards an approach that was, in the words of Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove, "vigorously selective, and sought to have no element, no line or colour in the picture that did not contribute to the unified expression."<sup>2</sup>

*North Shore, Lake Superior III (Lake Superior Sketch LXIX)* is Harris pushing the boundaries of his representative approach, by not just paring down the representation of the land to its essentials, but also actively searching out compositions that allowed him to focus on form and space alone. Harris's ideals of grandeur and expansiveness were matched perfectly to the high hills on the north shore of Lake Superior, cleared of "distracting" minutiae by forest fires two decades prior. It was a country aligned with his thoughts on the creative spirit, which he saw as "austere," with

"no sentimentality, no soothing for any complacencies, no pretty comfort."<sup>3</sup>

In works such as this, the composition is straightforward and uncluttered, with the exposed rock, traces of snow and fallen remnants of trees the only details portrayed in the foreground. Though simple, the colouring of this work is refined, showing Harris's mastery of subtle variation in tones and reflecting his strong powers of observation and translation. The far hill's deep purples, maroons and burnt oranges are characteristic of Harris's depictions of late autumn, and their richness and depth evokes the idea of the muscle and sinew of the country being revealed, emphasizing strength and vitality, even in its austerity. The sky, in contrast, is fully animated, with glowing light emanating from behind clouds that seem barely able to stay aloft with such weight.

Boldly, Harris has forgone any specific central focus of this work. The sense of navigable space and the inviting blue of the distant land instead pull you into the landscape. By 1925, Harris had started using larger panels for his oil sketches, moving to 12 x 15-inch panels such as this. This expansion in size was not to allow for more detail in his compositions, but instead to allow for more space and sense of expansion in the volume he was seeking to portray. His works in this period became portals to three-dimensional realms, often where heavy skies hung over the deep distance of a far horizon.

The "not for sale" notation on the verso of this work indicates that Harris initially did not want to part with it before he had a chance to reflect and fully consider its significance. Presumably once he had done so, he let it go, and it was acquired by fellow artist Brownlee Walker Haydon, who had a shared interest in theosophy, and then by descent to a private collection in Los Angeles.

We thank Alec Blair, Director/Lead Researcher, Lawren S. Harris Inventory Project, for contributing the above essay.

1. A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1958), 57.

2. Bess Harris and R.G.P. Colgrove, eds., *Lawren Harris* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), 51.

3. *Ibid.*, 72.

#### ABOUT THE PROVENANCE

THIS FINE PAINTING was unearthed earlier this year by family members sorting through boxes that their father, artist Brownlee Walker Haydon, had stored since moving from New York to Los Angeles around 1948. Born in Saskatchewan in 1914, Haydon was raised in Chicago, but the family maintained their connection with Canada, visiting relatives in Toronto annually. In the 1930s, Haydon moved to New York to become an artist. It is unknown whether Haydon acquired the painting in New York, on one of his visits to Canada, or while building a cabin in Vermont (Harris moved to nearby New Hampshire in 1934).

**ESTIMATE: \$125,000 – 175,000**