

## 116 Emily Carr

BCSFA CGP 1871 – 1945

### Tossed by the Wind

oil on canvas, signed Emily Carr, 1939  
32 1/8 x 27 1/4 in, 81.6 x 69.2 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist  
Vancouver Art Gallery Art Rental, Vancouver  
Acquired from the above by a Private Collection,  
Vancouver, circa 1950s  
By descent to the present Private Collection, Vancouver

#### LITERATURE

Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography*, 1979, reproduced  
page 245

EMILY CARR'S PAINTING *Tossed by the Wind*, 1939, shows that she had not lost the ability to create compelling and original new images in the last three years of her painting life. In June of 1939, she had her second heart attack. She had already sold the caravan that had enabled her immersive sketching trips into the woods, and consequently, she would find her subjects closer to home. *Tossed by the Wind* shows Carr's continuing openness to the revelatory wisdom of nature. She infused her paintings with a new concern with physicality and the body, at a time when illness and aging were inescapable factors in her life.

Most of the image is taken up with a windswept grassy slope, and the viewpoint is close to the ground. Five years earlier, still hale and hearty, Carr had written in her journal, "Dear Mother Earth, I think I have always specially belonged to you. I have loved from babyhood to roll upon you, to lie with my face pressed right down on to you in my sorrows. I love the look of you, the smell and the feel of you."<sup>1</sup> One day earlier, she wrote the following after a day of sketching on Beacon Hill, near her Victoria home: "Out on the cliffs sketching for the first time this year. It was unbelievably good, sunny and warm. Protected by the bank from the north wind, I put my 'whole' into it—sky and sea."<sup>2</sup>

Now Carr is back on Beacon Hill, but in 1939 it is the ground, not the sky that attracts her, and she paints as though she wants to touch and stroke and embrace its surface. This striking thematic shift is confirmed by other paintings of the same year, such as *Rocks by the Sea*, which Carr described as "a great rounded cliff of clay covered with shaggy dry cliff grass... the mound has that heavy cumbersomeness like the hindquarters of a bear,"<sup>3</sup> or *Roots*, where a dark hole gapes in the ground beside the earthy torn-up root system of a fallen tree.<sup>4</sup>

*Tossed by the Wind* was based on a rapid sketch—*Broom, Beacon Hill* (figure 1)—that Carr had made a year or two earlier. British settlers had introduced broom, a low shrub with abundant brilliant yellow flowers much loved in English gardens and now a feature of the countryside around Victoria. Carr welcomed the splashes of yellow that punctuate her sketch and appear on the right side of the composition in the canvas. The sketch is horizontal and its clump of scrubby trees, resisting the wind, is positioned



Lawren Harris and Ira Dilworth at the Vancouver Art Gallery around the time of the opening of the new Emily Carr Memorial Galleries, 1951

just beside the centre. For her canvas Carr chose a vertical format, enabling her to greatly enlarge the grassy expanse in the foreground. She has clarified the sketch's tangle of trees into taller, more specific forms, and added two small fir trees to create spatial recession. Her painting departs from the effects she had sought up to 1936. Gone are the sublime all-encompassing skies and the upward movement of trees that seem to aspire to reach into heaven. The artist now tends to look into her trees from below while her skies more closely hug the earth, "broken and tucked behind," as she wrote when describing *Rocks by the Sea*. Trees and skies now are equal partners in a dense weave of brush marks that cover the surface.<sup>5</sup>

In 1937, Carr had written about trying to give her canvases the spontaneity and life of her sketches: "I began them with huge brush strokes, first going for the movement and direction such as I got in my sketches, and with great freedom."<sup>6</sup> In *Tossed by the Wind*, the repetitive rhythmic marks that cover the surface evoke the action of the artist's hand, like that of grooming a dog's fur

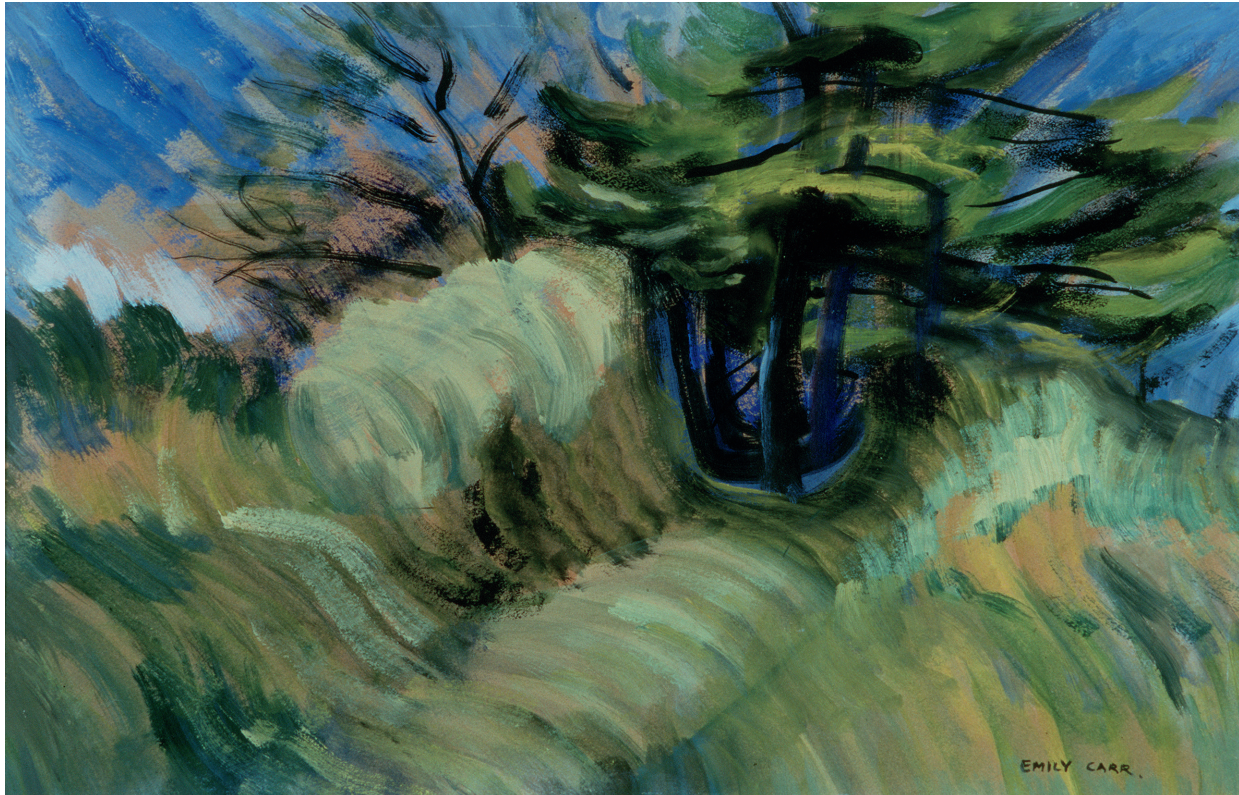


FIGURE 1: **EMILY CARR**  
**Broom, Beacon Hill**  
 oil on paper mounted on board, 1937 – 1938  
 11 ½ x 17 in, 29.2 x 43.2 cm  
 Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

Not for sale with this lot

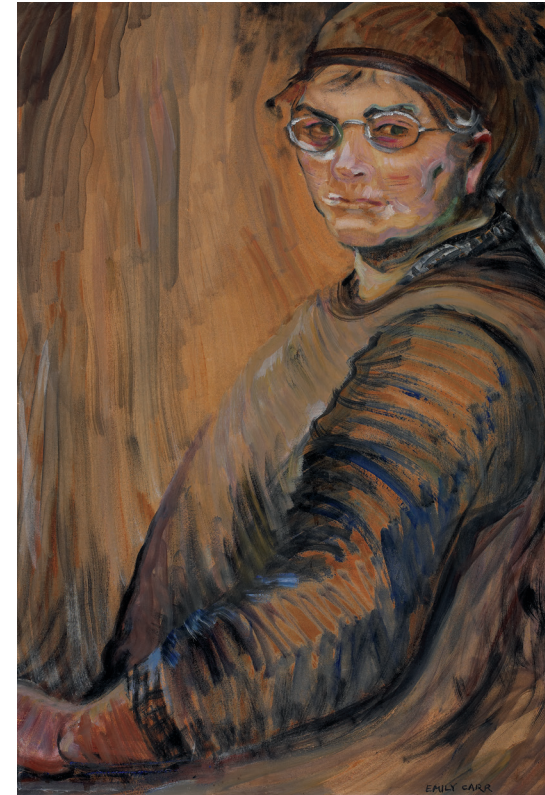


FIGURE 2: **EMILY CARR**  
**Self-portrait**  
 oil on wove paper, mounted on plywood, 1938 – 1939  
 33 ¾ x 22 ¾ in, 85.5 x 57.7 cm  
 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Peter Bronfman, 1990, Photo: NGC

Not for sale with this lot

or brushing a child's hair. The sense of physicality, of intimate closeness and the desire to caress are all conveyed by the artist's emphatic brushwork.

The earth in her painting is now a living body, and in the same year Carr painted a self-portrait (figure 2, collection of the National Gallery) wherein, remarkably, she does not shy away from examining her own aged self.<sup>7</sup> Her face looks out at us severe and challenging, but her body is rooted, strong as a mountain, its contours brushed in with those same vigorous strokes.

It was in part Walt Whitman's denunciation of Victorian prudery that helped Carr to let go of her discomfort with her body. His book *Leaves of Grass* had been her constant companion on sketching trips in her van. In her journals she described her joy, when camping, at walking barefoot in the dewy grass or immersing herself naked in a stream at dusk. Whitman's idea, that the sheer material, physical presence of nature was language itself, now seems to be made manifest in Carr's last paintings. In "A Song of the Rolling Earth," one of Carr's favourite poems that she shared with her friend Ira Dilworth, Whitman wrote:

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,  
 ... the substantial words are in the ground and sea,  
 They are in the air, they are in you ...  
 In the best poems re-appears the body ...<sup>8</sup>

*Tossed by the Wind* is itself a poem in paint. It shows the extraordinary insights and inventiveness Carr could achieve as compensation for the heart disease that was now her constant companion. This remarkable painting is a love song to wind as the breath of life.

Another compensation for Carr at this time was gaining, at last, an appreciative audience in the West. In the late 1930s, Carr was adopted as a venerated senior figure of modernism by a new young, progressive generation. Interest in modern art was fostered by art schools, universities and the architectural profession. In 1938, artist Nan Cheney organized a solo show of Carr's recent work for the Vancouver Art Gallery. A success, it was followed by further solo shows there in 1939, 1941, 1943 and 1944. Carr rejoiced that at last a local audience had found a shared

experience in her work, and that many paintings were sold, helping her to pay her personal bills.

Her position was consolidated when Lawren Harris, a long-time friend and supporter, moved in 1940 to Vancouver, where he quickly took a leadership role at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Together with Dilworth, Harris helped Carr to organize a collection of 45 of her best paintings to become the Emily Carr Picture Collection as a bequest for the province. At her death in 1945, Harris was also a trustee of the paintings remaining in Carr's estate; more paintings went into the Emily Carr collection, while others were put aside to be sold to raise money for an Emily Carr Scholarship for young artists in the province.

Meanwhile the Women's Auxiliary, founded in 1943 to raise funds for the VAG, organized an Art Rental program. It was chaired by Mrs. James P. Fell, a keen collector of Carr's work and friend of Harris, who some years earlier had asked Harris to sell her *Swirl* (see lot 120 in this sale). Harris kept *Swirl* but could help by supplying the Art Rental program with Carr paintings, whose sale would benefit both the VAG and the Emily Carr scholarship

fund. So, *Tossed by the Wind*, which was acquired through purchase at the Art Rental program, remains in Vancouver today thanks to that city's at last espousing Emily Carr.

We thank Gerta Moray, author of *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr*, for contributing the above essay.

1. Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1966), 101, entry March 9, 1934.
2. Ibid., entry March 8, 1934.
3. Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin / Douglas & McIntyre, 1979), 135; *Rocks by the Sea* reproduced same page.
4. Ibid., *Roots* reproduced p. 173.
5. Ibid., 135.
6. Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 294, entry September 14, 1937.
7. *Self Portrait* (1938-39) reproduced in Shadbolt, *Emily Carr*, 190.
8. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1915 edition), 145.

**ESTIMATE: \$1,200,000 – 1,600,000**