



114 James Wilson Morrice

CAC RCA 1865 – 1924

Paris, View from Studio Window

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled and inscribed *Estate J.W. Morrice / Return to W. Scott & Sons / #487*, circa 1916
18 ¼ x 21 ¾ in, 46.4 x 55.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist
W. Scott & Sons, Montreal
Private Collection, Ontario
By descent to the present Private Collection, Ontario

LITERATURE

James Wilson Morrice Sketchbook #10, 1914 and 1915, collection of Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, a similar pencil sketch reproduced page 12

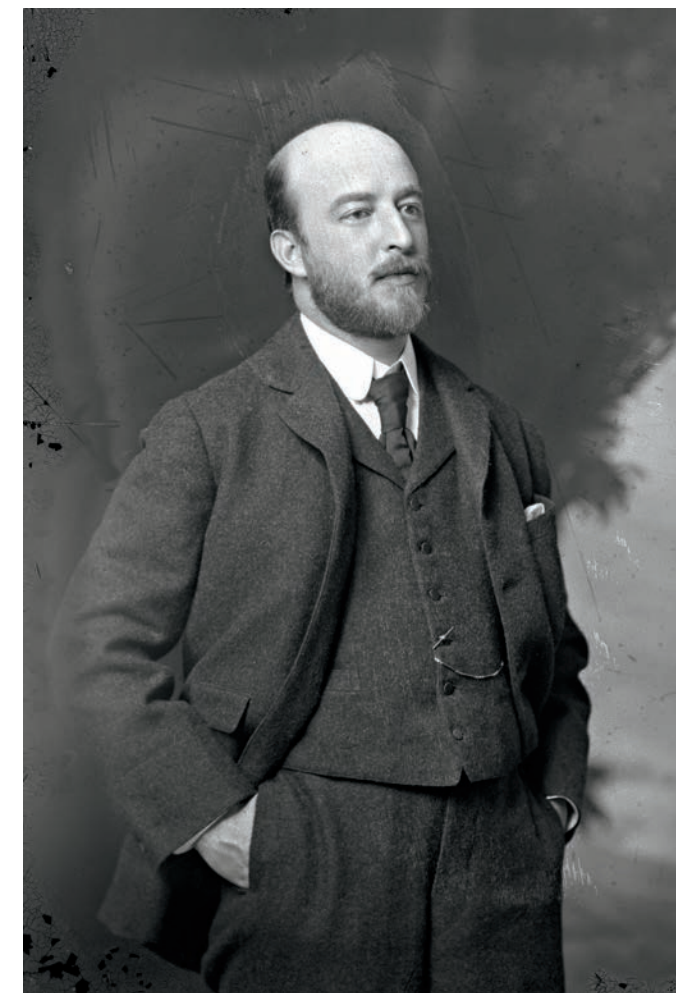
EXHIBITED

Art Association of Montreal, *Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by the Late James W. Morrice, RCA*, January 16 – February 15, 1925, titled as *Paris, View from the Studio Window*, lent by the Estate of the Late J.W. Morrice, RCA, catalogue #28

IN THE LATE nineteenth century, Paris was the capital of western art. Students from around the world, attracted by the prestige of the city's teaching ateliers, its museums and buoyant art life, came to study, paint, travel and, on occasion, stay. Having fulfilled his filial duties by passing his Bar exams in Toronto, the 24-year old Scottish-Montrealer James Wilson Morrice arrived in Paris to study briefly at the Académie Julian. He never looked back.

Morrice delighted in the visual displays that Paris offered: its streets and curbside cafés, the bridges across the Seine, the parks, gardens and theatres. In the 1890s, the city's public spaces became one of his principal subjects and he repeatedly returned to the banks of the Seine, where he painted oil sketches and canvases of the river's shores, barges, bridges and the stalls of the booksellers that lined the river's banks. In October 1899, he moved into a studio at 45 Quai des Grands-Augustins, on the left bank of the Seine between the Pont Neuf and Pont Saint-Michel, with a view across to the Place Dauphine on the Île de la Cité.

In 1904, a winter view from Morrice's studio, titled *Quai des Grands-Augustins* (figure 1), was purchased by the French government for the museum of contemporary art, the Musée du Luxembourg. Now in Paris's Musée d'Orsay, the painting is arranged in parallel, horizontal planes. A woman carrying an umbrella walks her dog across the foreground sidewalk towards a bookseller and black-clad woman at the left. The figures are framed by the bookstalls, and beyond one glimpses ice in the river, and the ramp and embankments on the far shore crowned by apartment buildings on the Place Dauphine. The horizontals are united vertically across the canvas by a row of thin, almost leafless trees rising from behind the stalls. The misty, evening nocturne is painted in a delicate palette of beige, brown and pinks with highlights of green and golden yellow. A smaller version of the subject, painted in a palette of browns and greens, was acquired by the National Gallery of Canada in 1909.



James Wilson Morrice, Montreal
Photo: William Notman (1826 – 1891)
Collection of the McCord Museum, II-13235



FIGURE 1: **JAMES WILSON MORRICE**
Quai des Grands-Augustins
 oil on canvas, 1904
 25 1/4 x 31 1/2 in, 65 x 80 cm
 Collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF1980-146
 Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Not for sale with this lot

Morrice painted a number of variant views of the quai in different seasons over the years, always interpreted in an evolving pictorial language. When traveling, the artist's common practice was to paint small oil sketches or *pochades* to define a composition, with additional details drawn in his sketchbooks. Given the number of Quai des Grands-Augustins paintings, the paucity of drawn or painted studies for the canvases is somewhat surprising. Perceived daily while in Paris, the fluctuations of light and colour must have haunted his imagination, allowing him to work directly on the canvas.

Paintings of the Paris quais were interrupted by Morrice's travels to North Africa and the West Indies from 1912 to 1915. When war broke out in August 1914, he briefly sought refuge in London. As Elizabeth Pennell wrote, "To be shut up in his studio alone after eight o'clock in the evening was too much for his nerves."¹ With travel restricted by the war, Morrice returned to the nearby quais in three canvases: *Spring, Quai des Grands-Augustins* and *Autumn, Quai des Grands-Augustins*, both in the National Gallery of Canada (accession numbers 30481 and 46627), and *Paris, View from Studio Window*. The first two are painted thinly, the figures almost silhouettes. The compositions find their precedent in

the 1904 canvas, with the bookstalls, barges, river and apartment buildings on the far side of the Seine being the principal components, with the vertical trees behind the bookstalls uniting the upper and lower parts of the composition. The foreground street runs at an angle from right to left, giving a greater dynamism to the composition, as does the freer brushwork. In *Paris, View from Studio Window*, the paint is less transparent, the trees and buildings more solid. The same silhouette defines the building on the Place Dauphine and the ramp from the river to the Quai des Orfèvres is clearly defined. In spite of the rain, the mood is joyful. A sole figure carrying an umbrella walks by on the wet city street. Most stunning is the rich blue sky, recalling the beautiful blue walls of his painting *House in Santiago* (Tate Gallery, London) of 1915.

But life was not static on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, as Morrice described in a letter to fellow artist Joseph Pennell.

When I arrived at my studio I found a most ghastly change—the shop next door is now an automobile shop—it is painted red—a beastly hot red—what one would naturally expect... At night there is a huge lantern with a large number & the



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word garage underneath giving it the appearance of a place of doubtful fame...²

For whatever reason, Morrice had moved east to 23 Quai de la Tournelle by the fall of 1917.³ The new studio still looked out over the Seine as seen in *Quai de la Seine: effet d'automne*⁴, correctly identified by Donald Buchanan as being a view from the Quai de la Tournelle.⁵ Similar elements form the composition; however, the vertical trees align the street in the foreground, partially concealing the bookstalls, and the buildings on the Île Saint-Louis rise above the young trees.

Previously unknown and unpublished, *Paris, View from Studio Window* is a superb complement and a major addition to the important body of Morrice's paintings of the Quai des Grands-Augustins, possibly the final canvas of this cherished view.

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada, and author of *Morrice, A Gift to the Nation: The G. Blair Laing Collection*, for contributing the above essay.

Thanks to Lucie Dorais, art historian, author of *J.W. Morrice* (National Gallery of Canada, 1985) and compiler of the catalogue

raisonné of the work of James Wilson Morrice, for her assistance with the cataloguing of this painting. This work will be included in Dorais's forthcoming catalogue raisonné of the artist's work.

1. Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *The Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 2:145.
2. J.W. Morrice, Paris, to Joseph Pennell, London, 12 September [1914?], Pennell Papers (MS S-79-93857, container 248), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
3. Edmond Dyonnet, Montreal, to Eric Brown, Ottawa, 16 November 1917 (file 7.1—Art & Artists), Library & Archives of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
4. Reproduced in colour in Sotheby's, Toronto, sale catalogue, *Important Canadian Art*, 18 November 1992, lot 81
5. Donald W. Buchanan, *James Wilson Morrice: A Biography* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1936), 170.

ESTIMATE: \$600,000 – 800,000