

123 Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins

1838 – 1919

Untitled (Camp Scene on the Ottawa)

watercolour on paper on card, initialed, circa 1870

15 × 21 ½ in, 38.1 × 54.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, United Kingdom

Private Collection, Ontario

FRANCES ANNE HOPKINS (née Beechey) has become well-known as a result of a group of paintings with the subject of voyageur life and canoe travel that has been in the collection of Library and Archives Canada since 1921. Many of her other works remain in private and family hands, or are known only through exhibition catalogues. Hopkins's life and work has been the subject of a number of popular and scholarly articles and essays¹ as well as two recent books, Thomas Schultze's *Frances Anne Hopkins: Images from Canada* (2008) and MaryEllen Weller-Smith's biography *France Anne Hopkins: Hudson's Bay Company Wife, Voyageurs' Artist* (2022). Her work was the subject of the major exhibition *Frances Anne Hopkins, 1838 – 1919: Canadian Scenery*, organized by the Thunder Bay Art Gallery in 1990.

Born into an artistic family in 1838, Hopkins was home-schooled, and she was likely taught to draw and paint by her father, Frederick Beechey, RN, and her uncle Richard Brydges Beechey, who exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1832 to 1877. In 1858, she married Edward Martin Hopkins, a widower 15 years her senior, and moved to Canada to help raise his three boys from a previous marriage. Her husband was a senior official in the Hudson's Bay Company and was often absent on long journeys into the Canadian interior, or to England on company business. From 1858 to 1870, she lived mostly in Lachine and Montreal, although she also returned to England for extended periods. During this time she gave birth to six children, only two of whom survived to adulthood. She was left to cope with a large household for extended periods of time, but nevertheless she pursued an artistic career, becoming involved with the Art Association of Montreal. She was also one of the founders of the Montreal Sketching Club in 1861.

Hopkins carried out a great deal of *plein air* sketching during her life in Canada, and she began to concentrate on the disappearing life of voyageur travel. Canoes appear in the paintings of earlier nineteenth-century Canadian artists such as Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff, but the canoe was an important subject in Hopkins's oeuvre. She made many short canoe trips around Montreal, to Trois-Rivières and Carillon, in the early years of her life in Canada. In 1864, she accompanied her husband on a longer canoe trip along the north shore of Lake Superior from Fort William to Michipicoten, and in 1866, on a journey up the Ottawa River to Mattawa. In July and August of 1869, she and her husband undertook an ambitious trip from Fort William to Montreal. As her husband noted in a letter to one of his fur trade colleagues: "Canoe travel agrees with her."²

In September of 1866, Hopkins shipped many of her Canadian watercolours back to London, where some were exhibited.³ In the spring *Conversazione* of the Art Association of Montreal in 1870, she exhibited 16 watercolours, all related to her canoeing experiences.⁴ That same year, she returned to England for good, returning to Canada only once, in 1884. In England, she continued to pursue her artistic career and exhibited widely, often drawing on her North American experiences. She passed away in March 1919.

This watercolour demonstrates Hopkins's artistic power. The view is likely of the Ottawa River, as Hopkins and her husband traveled in a north canoe on the Ottawa, rather than a larger *canot de maître*. Her attention to detail in documenting the *canot du nord* and camp scene, as well as her ability to capture the rich and varied colours of a Canadian autumn, shows the stunning beauty of the landscape, at a time when canoeing transformed from being a necessity for travel and the transport of goods to a leisure pursuit. With its stunning effect of vibrant fall colours and the atmospheric effects of mist on the river and the rising smoke of the campfire, this is an outstanding watercolour by Hopkins. Her work in documenting a passing way of life is now recognized and celebrated as an important part of Canada's art history.

We thank Jim Burant, adjunct professor of art history at Carleton University, independent curator and contributor to *Frances Anne Hopkins: Images from Canada*, for contributing the above essay.

1. This recognition includes Grace Lee Nute, "Voyageurs' Artist," *The Beaver*, June 1947, 32–36; Alice M. Johnson, "Edward and Frances Hopkins of Montreal," *The Beaver*, Autumn 1971, 14–19; Elisabeth Margaret Hopkins, "Grandmama," *The Beaver*, Winter 1976, 25–29; Sylvia A. Antoniou, catalogue entries 25 and 26, *The Painted Past* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1984), 41–43; Robert Stacey, "Frances Anne Hopkins and the Canoe-eye-view," *Frances Anne Hopkins (1838–1919): Canadian Scenery* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1990), 44–57; Eva Major-Marothy, catalogue entry 21, *A Place in History: Twenty Years of Acquiring Paintings, Drawings and Prints at the National Archives of Canada* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991), 46–49; Kristina Huneault, "Placing Frances Anne Hopkins: A British-Born Artist in Colonial Canada," *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 179–99; and Jim Burant, "Frances Anne Hopkins, Making Memory and the Myth of Canadian Identity," in *Frances Anne Hopkins: Images from Canada* (Manotick, ON: Penumbra Press, 2008), 11–22.

2. Much of the biographical information about Hopkins has been summarized and thoroughly researched by MaryEllen Weller-Smith in her excellent self-published book *Frances Anne Hopkins: Hudson's Bay Company Wife, Voyageurs' Artist* (Sheridan, MN: Jackpine Books, 2022). This particular quote is cited on p. 114.

3. *Ibid.*, 129.

4. *Ibid.*, 189–90.

ESTIMATE: \$70,000 – 90,000

