



134 Cornelius David Krieghoff

1815 – 1872

The Sleigh Race

oil on canvas, signed, dated 1856 and inscribed *Quebec* and on verso titled on the gallery label and stamped with the Watson Art Galleries wax seal
17 x 24 in, 43.2 x 61 cm

PROVENANCE

Acquired at auction in London, UK, by Watson Art Galleries, Montreal, circa 1920
Acquired from the above by Gavin L. Ogilvie, Montreal, January 1921
By descent to the present Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff: Pioneer Painter of North America*, 1934, mentioned page 58 and listed pages 81 and 110
Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff*, The Gallery of Canadian Art No. 1, 1962, listed page 10

EXHIBITED

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Exhibition of Paintings by Cornelius Krieghoff, 1815 – 1872*, February – March 1934, traveling in 1934 to Art Association of Montreal, catalogue #99

CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF IS possibly one of the best-known Canadian artists of the nineteenth century. His large production, his keen sense of observation, humour and rich colouring, as well as the widespread availability of his images, have all contributed to his reputation. For many he is seen as having made unique contributions to our vision of the landscapes and life of mid-century Quebec. Yet few of Krieghoff's subjects were new to Canadian art. Many had been painted by earlier artists, most notably by the British military topographers stationed in Canada. For instance, waterfalls in the Quebec City region, which were frequently painted by Krieghoff, had long been favourite subjects for artists working in Lower Canada. James Peachey and George Heriot had painted the ice cone at the base of Montmorency Falls in 1781 and 1794, respectively. Thomas Davies, Charles Ramus Forrest, James Pattison Cockburn and James Hope-Wallace had painted the falls on the La Puce, Sainte-Anne and Saint-Ferréol rivers, subjects also painted by Joseph Légaré around 1840.

Winter sleighs were regular subjects of early Canadian views, especially the gathering of the sleighing or tandem clubs, depicted in both watercolours and prints. Andrew Brown, John Crawford Young, James Smillie, Sir Richard George Augustus Levinge, William Eager and James Duncan had all depicted the gatherings of the military and middle-class members of the tandem clubs in Quebec, Saint John, Halifax and Montreal. While Krieghoff may not have had access to the British artists' original watercolours, he was undoubtedly familiar with the prints published by Peachey, Cockburn and Smillie.

Born in Amsterdam and having spent his youth in Bavaria, by 1846 Krieghoff had settled in Montreal, moving to Quebec City



FIGURE 1: CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF
The Ice Bridge at Longue-Pointe

oil on canvas, circa 1847 – 1848
24 x 30 in, 60.8 x 76.2 cm
National Gallery of Canada
Gift of Geneva Jackson, Kitchener, Ontario, 1933
Photo: NGC

Not for sale with this lot



FIGURE 2: *The Sleigh Race* hanging at the National Gallery of Canada during the *Exhibition of Paintings by Cornelius Krieghoff, 1815 – 1872*, February 1934
Photo: NGC



detail lot 134

seven years later. In 1848, four lithographs after Krieghoff's paintings, "illustrative of life in Lower Canada," were published by R. & C. Chalmers of Montreal.¹ More animated than his earlier compositions, his print of the Place d'Armes continues the tradition of tandem club gatherings. Although the principal subject was the then recently constructed Bank of Montreal on Saint James Street, the foreground is animated by elegant sleighs circling the square. Another lithograph, erroneously captioned *Sledge Race Near Montreal*, though more accurately titled on the portfolio wrapper as *Sleighting Scene on the Saint Lawrence*, has been identified by Russell Harper as depicting Lord and Lady Elgin, to whom the prints were "dedicated by permission."² While it is uncertain whether one of the passengers is Lord Elgin, the print does depict two elegant couples in a cutter with steel runners, being driven by a team of four trotters—but not a race. Couples in elevated sleighs or cutters, pulled across the ice by horses in tandem and very possibly portrait commissions, appear in a number of Krieghoff's canvases over the years, the sequels to the 1848 lithograph *Sleighting Scene on the Saint Lawrence*.

But Krieghoff strikes a new note in his paintings of the late 1840s depicting rural families huddling in sleighs stopped by the frozen water's edge. While *habitants* or *canadiens* had appeared in the paintings of earlier Quebec artists, the figures were usually mere staffage in landscapes and urban views, not principal actors. Following the seventeenth-century Dutch tradition of painting scenes from the daily life of all classes, Krieghoff brought the Quebec rural population to the forefront. In *The Ice Bridge at Longue-Pointe* from circa 1847–1848 (figure 1), the family *canadienne* is the principal subject. The mother and children huddle in a box sleigh or *berlot* with a single white horse, while the father converses with two men in a *traîneau à batons*, or stick sled, pulled

by a brown horse. The men wear traditional hooded blanket coats with a red stripe, clasped by a *ceinture fléchée* or arrow sash, and a fur hat or toque. The path across the ice is marked with a sapling or *balise* and a cutter is being driven down the slope to the water's edge at the right. Three different sleighs are included in this vast winter landscape.

Ramsay Cook has written about the importance of Krieghoff's documentation and interpretation of rural Quebec sleighs and horses and how they reveal his perception of class and ethnic differences.³ Pairs of imported trotters pull the elevated sleighs with narrow metal runners in the 1848 lithographs, while the *canadien* horses, one per sleigh, were small with powerful legs and shoulders, broad hooves and a heavy mane and tail. They are harnessed in the rural fashion and the boxes, fitted out with seats and sitting low on the snow, are mounted on wide wooden runners. The low box sleigh was known as a *berline* while the box set on slightly higher runners was known as a *berlot*. The more elementary *traîneau à batons* had no box to protect the passengers or seats, merely a platform of simple boards, turned up at one end like a toboggan, with vertical sticks to hold the load of wood, ice, game or passengers, with the driver standing to hold the reins.

Kriehoff produced a variety of compositions on related themes. From the early 1850s, the static groupings of the late 1840s were replaced by racing sleighs driven by *canadiens* in canvases variously titled *Going to (or Returning from) Town*, *Bilking the Toll*, *The Upset Sleigh* or *A Winter Incident*, in which a sleigh forces another off the narrow road in a winter storm. While the themes are similar, each is interpreted in an original way, always with immense creativity and imagination. To the best of my knowledge, no painting is a direct copy of another painting by Krieghoff but always an inventive reworking.

The Sleigh Race from 1856, presented here, reworks a grouping previously seen in *Sleigh Race on the Saint Lawrence at Quebec*, an 1852 canvas of approximately the same dimensions, a detail of which was used to illustrate the cover of the catalogue of the major Krieghoff exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1999.⁴ In the 1852 canvas, four seated *canadiens* in a *berlot* race against three standing *canadiens* in a *traîneau à batons*. The racing sleighs cross the ice below the citadel at Quebec and in the distant right can be glimpsed two additional cutters on the frozen river. As Laurier Lacroix has written, the 1852 racers reappear as one detail among many in the 1853 canvas *Montmorency Falls*.⁵

In *The Sleigh Race* from 1856, four seated figures occupy a *berline*, the runners reinforced with metal for smoother sliding, and three figures stand in the *traîneau à batons* racing from the frozen river to the shore. Three farmhouses crown the rises behind them, a sapling at the left marks the safe passage across the ice, and another sleigh can be seen on the slope between the two houses on the right. In the 1856 canvas, a dark brown horse with a blue ribbon pulls the *berline* and a bay horse with a red ribbon pulls the *traîneau à batons*, reversing the horses' decoration and placement in the 1852 canvas. Krieghoff similarly rearranged the poses and costumes of the racers and horses, and in the 1856 canvas, the rear figure on the *traîneau à batons* cocks a snook at his competitors.⁶

This painting was included in the first major Krieghoff exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada, in 1934 (figure 2), and in Marius Barbeau's seminal volume on the artist, *Cornelius Krieghoff: Pioneer Painter of North America*, published that same year. As Barbeau wrote, the painting is "full of movement and a sense of fun and life."⁷ And in 1962, Barbeau

described this painting as "among the best examples of the artist's Quebec period."⁸

We thank Charles C. Hill, former curator of Canadian art from 1980 to 2014 at the National Gallery of Canada, for contributing the above essay.

1. Reproduced in Dennis Reid, *Kriehoff: Images of Canada* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, in assoc. with Douglas & McIntyre, 1999), exhibition catalogue, 35–36, 283.
2. J. Russell Harper, *Kriehoff* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 39, 43.
3. Ramsay Cook, "The Outsider as Insider: Cornelius Krieghoff's Art of Describing," in Reid, *Kriehoff*, 145–63.
4. Reid, *Kriehoff*, reproduced p. 22, plate 21.
5. Laurier Lacroix, "Le cheval canadien et les voitures hippomobiles d'hiver vus par Cornelius Krieghoff," *Les Cahiers des dix*, no. 69 (2015): 281–301. *Montmorency Falls* is reproduced in Reid, *Kriehoff*, 104–5.
6. A variant of the 1856 canvas, titled *Sleigh Race, Quebec* and dated 1857, was illustrated in the catalogue *Selections from the Sobey Collections, Part 1, Cornelius Krieghoff (1815–1872)* (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1983), cat. no. 4.
7. Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff: Pioneer Painter of North America* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1934), 110.
8. Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff*, The Gallery of Canadian Art No. 1 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), 10.

ESTIMATE: \$150,000 – 250,000