Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons casts off the enduring notions associated with French Impressionism by shedding light on the contributions of Canadian artists to this widespread movement. The first of its kind, this publication adds a new chapter to the history of World Impressionism as it positions the work of the Canadian Impressionists within the cosmopolitan milieus of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Progressing from Impressionistic renderings of contemporary life to interpretations of reality through the lenses of Fauvism, Post-Impressionism, and subsequent modes of expression, Impressionism in Canada evolved into a form of modernity tailored to the spirit of a young nation.
Prologue:
Canada and World Impressionism

Adam Gopnik

“As modern art becomes for us less a train racing forward than a many-sided landscape to be explored at leisure, and for pleasure, progress becomes a less certain term.”

Impressionism is a misnamed French movement from the 1860s to the 1880s. Actualisme might have been closer to its true spirit, which was not to record a quick impression of a scene or place but to give permanent form to the ambivalent pleasures of modern life, and in a style shorn of rhetoric and the painstaking pomposity of official art. It was an art about light and life, and how each illuminates the other. Its single most evident signature – as instantly defining as the recession in perspective of Quattrocento painting – was its high-key colour. But these bright tones were less an urge to fidelity, a way of “capturing the light” of a specific moment, than a way of asserting the availability of pleasure.

Impressionism was a search outside the pieties of official art for the truths of life as it happened. The dappled summer light of Impressionist painting is, if not an invention, a specific and in some ways perverse choice: the darker, violet-brown and black key of Barbizon realism, or the steeling silver light of Corot and Daubigny, actually look more like the light of Paris and its environs as it really appears most of the year. Nothing is rarer than the broken sunlight of Renoir and Monet. The seemingly neutral descriptive term “effects of sunlight,” familiar from Impressionist wall labels, is loaded, not neutral: there isn’t enough sun in Paris to have much of an effect. Choosing to see the sun in Paris is an effect in itself.

By choosing life as it is, sun-lit as it only sometimes may be, Impressionism provided an infusion of delight in all Western art. So powerful was it that it “caught” – it went viral, as we now say – and quickly produced pendant movements throughout Europe and America. Not since the Roman Baroque swept through Iberia and Northern Europe has any artistic style been so rapidly diffused and widely potent. There were Germans like Max Liebermann and Americans like Childe Hassam; a doctoral thesis dwells on Turkish Impressionists; and the Greeks claim one fine Impressionist, Périclès Pantazis, for their own. British Impressionism, meanwhile, includes such odd masterpieces as Sargent’s Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose, where the insouciance of Impressionism, all corners and odd angles on life, meets the more orderly picture-book love of the decorative (figure 1.1). This blend, already available in the Pre-Raphaelite and Arts and Crafts movements, produces a form of Impressionism that will continue to blossom in children’s books. The British myth of the nursery is, after all, almost as powerful as the French myth of the café.
have delved into this subject. In particular, special attention has been given to the lives of those artists who travelled abroad between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War – a period described as the most cosmopolitan phase of Canadian art.

Extended intervals of study and travel abroad exposed waves of Canadian artists to the art movements that emerged independently or out of French Impressionism from the late 1870s onward. Subsequent trends and fashions rapidly broke new ground and influenced not only the Canadians but all international artists living in France at the time. Paris was, in a true sense, the magnet that drew them in and exposed them to the avant-garde, cultivating in them a global approach to art. Yet no Canadian who ventured to study in France set out to become an Impressionist.

When the first Canadian painters arrived in Paris around 1880, the novelty of Impressionism had already begun to wane. Although the emphasis on depicting modern subjects in an equally modern style distinguished the Impressionists from earlier art movements – such as the Naturalists – idyllic scenes of rural life, popular in the nineteenth century, tended to emphasize the continuity of traditional agrarian life, especially at a time when the Industrial Revolution was driving the peasant population off the land and into the city. Paris was a modern metropolis already transformed by the vast urbanization under Baron Haussmann.

An interest in everyday life in an urban metropolis was unusual for most Canadians. With the exception of James Wilson Morrice, and occasionally William Blair Bruce, Maurice Cullen, and Clarence Gagnon, who dared to capture the modernity in urban life, not many painted the city (figures 2.1 and 2.2). Few Canadian artists selected the intricate experiences of nightlife in concert halls, the atmosphere of crowded cafés and bars, and the joyous times of popular feasts and festivals as subjects. Morrice is a pleasant exception: his images of café culture, fêtes, and circuses are unique in Canadian art (figure 2.3). Caroline and Frank Armington were also exceptional: having made the French capital their home for approximately thirty years, they turned exclusively to city life for inspiration (figure 2.4).

The artists’ fascination with recording the enormous reconstruction faded, however, and instead they sought out the charm of quiet neighbourhoods as well as the cafés and light-filled public spaces that by then defined the notion of urban life. The Canadians who moved to Paris in the last decades of the nineteenth century encountered this air of change amid what became known as the juste milieu – the middle ground between Academicism and Impressionism from which each artist cultivated a personal and unique approach.

An interest in everyday life in an urban metropolis was unusual for most Canadians. With the exception of James Wilson Morrice, and occasionally William Blair Bruce, Maurice Cullen, and Clarence Gagnon, who dared to capture the modernity in urban life, not many painted the city (figures 2.1 and 2.2). Few Canadian artists selected the intricate experiences of nightlife in concert halls, the atmosphere of crowded cafés and bars, and the joyous times of popular feasts and festivals as subjects. Morrice is a pleasant exception: his images of café culture, fêtes, and circuses are unique in Canadian art (figure 2.3). Caroline and Frank Armington were also exceptional: having made the French capital their home for approximately thirty years, they turned exclusively to city life for inspiration (figure 2.4).

Fortunately, the French exhibition system did not differentiate between native or foreign submissions at the renowned Salons, permitting Canadians, like their international colleagues, to benefit from these coveted venues and garner international recognition and public acclaim. The experience of preparing and submitting works to the Salons in itself helped Canadian artists to stay abreast of modern developments in Europe and to forge new and important alliances. Cullen, for example, became the first Canadian to be elected a member of the Société nationale des beaux-arts in 1895, while Morrice served as a juror at the 1908 Salon d’Automne alongside Matisse, Marquet, and Rouault.
who spent several months at Julian’s, illustrates the kind of artistic labour required in the classrooms (figure 3.1).

At the time, this French Academic tradition regarded large narrative paintings on historical or mythological themes as the highest form of painting. It is not surprising, then, that the ability to master figure drawing lay at the core of the educational regime. Many of these professors also managed the Paris Salons— the annual spring exhibitions that marked the highlight of the artistic season. The Salons, begun in the seventeenth century, were juried exhibitions that brought together artists from around the world in a single, vast presentation. By the nineteenth century they had become hugely ambitious affairs with artists numbering in the thousands. Every Canadian artist who came to Paris vied for a place on those overcrowded walls. Having a work accepted meant exposure to a crowd of thousands, increased market opportunities, and the possibility of mention in one of the critical reviews. Crucially, it guaranteed validation back home: news that a Canadian was showing at the Paris Salon ensured newspaper coverage and reassured family and friends that the period of study overseas had paid off.

What impact did this highly controlled system of training, mentorship, and competition have on the development of Canadian artists in relation to Impressionism? Paradoxically, the system of instruction that drew artists to Paris was utterly at odds with Impressionism. The meticulously painted and tonal large-scale figure paintings executed in the indoor studios were a far cry, conceptually and formally, from the core tenets of Impressionism. A few of the early Canadian Impressionists followed their instincts and exchanged the crowded Parisian ateliers for the open air of the French countryside. They moved toward a self-determined and informal training ground that provided them with a different kind of art education.

The most pressing issue for the Canadians who stayed in Paris was finding suitable living accommodation. A majority congregated on the rive gauche—the Left Bank. The area of Montparnasse, comprising the 6th, 13th, and 14th arrondissements, formed the artistic heartbeat of...
Leisure is a primary subject in Impressionist art, and one of its pervasive themes is modern life at the water's edge. In varying degrees of engagement, Canadian painters responded to the Impressionist visualization of a carefree world without work, without urban noise and clamour, and where nothing unusual really happens. Canadians’ images of canals and rivers, bays and beaches, with expressive brushstrokes, shimmering light, open colour, and unmodelled forms suggest Impressionism’s visceral approach to portraying moments of outdoor pleasure. But artists from Canada also recognized that the Impressionist process demanded considered compositions, articulated pictorial space, objectified viewing points, and poised brushmarks of selected colour.

James Wilson Morrice was unique among Canadian artists during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because he lived in Paris for almost thirty-five years. Although he travelled widely, he always maintained a Parisian studio and had ready access to galleries, exhibitions, newspapers, art and illustrated magazines, and conversations with his wide circle of artistic and literary friends. Morrice was a first-hand witness to the evolution of the original Impressionists, the advent of Post-Impressionism and Fauvism, the Intimism of Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard, which he deeply admired, as well as Cubism, which he truly disliked.

Through regular visits to Normandy and Brittany, Morrice became familiar with northwest -ern France, its coastal resorts, and the Parisian vacationers who flocked by train to places made famous by the Impressionists and their predecessors – for example, *The Beach at Trouville*, 1864, by Eugène Boudin, and *In a Villa at the Seaside*, 1874, by Berthe Morisot (figures 5.1 and 5.2). Morrice’s *Beach at Mers*, c. 1898, combines a view of the town, the beach, and the water nestled under the enormous chalk cliff (plate 36). His holidaymakers, mainly fashionable women, suggesting it is a weekday, sit and stroll quietly along the beach; in contrast, a local woman in traditional costume sells her wares, becoming part of the “exotic” attractions of a modern holiday. *The Regatta*, c. 1902–07, only hints at the nearby resort of Saint-Malo, focusing instead in both the large painting and a related study on the sailing races that the French readily adopted from the British as a seaside leisure activity (plate 37 and figure 5.3). Where *Beach at Mers* gives almost equal weight to the sand and the sky, *The Regatta* balances sea and sky. Their low horizon line and flat space are a modernist reworking of a planar composition in stacked perspective.

“*The motif of strangers thrown together in close proximity as they share the same beach is one of the underlying themes of Impressionist paintings of the social ambience of the seaside.*”

Canadian Artists at the Water’s Edge

*Sandra Paikowsky*
A feminist rethinking of Impressionist painting by women in Canada counters what historian Maria Bucur describes as the “continuing masculinist discursive force field” that consistently foregrounds men in histories of modern art. Over a century later, women’s efforts to achieve freedom in their individual expression remain an essential if less recognized part of the modernist story. In the twenty-first century, then, who “owns” modernism? Its rebellious roots – its railings against the status quo of Victorian bourgeois society – emerged from artists, writers, and critics who believed that creative social rebellion and reinvention of the self constituted the power of art. Why, otherwise, would so many risk failure or poverty in their artistic quests – especially women?

The persistence of the “comfortable self-important mediocrity” that characterized late nineteenth-century bourgeois society accompanied the growth of capitalism. Technical innovation and industrialization had led to profound social disorientation in Europe, the United States, and Canada. Wealth pooled around business leaders whose influence increased the divisions within society, including the disenfranchisement of women. At its core, gender inequity in English Canada hung on the question of property rights. “English common-law rules that transferred the property of women to their husbands upon marriage were part of the larger package of laws emigrants from England brought to Canada,” explains legal historian Constance Backhouse. Women’s loss of individuality and identity in marriage remained unrecognized by the Supreme Court of Canada until the 1890s, when laws began to be passed to emancipate married women from their husband’s control in real estate, wages, and earnings.

The issue of property rights in Canada continued to be skewed in favour of white middle- and upper-class men well into the twentieth century. Still, gender relations did improve. At the century’s turn, women with wealth in urban Canada “were far from marginal players in the world of capital.” The passing of the Married Women’s Property Act enabled fathers to bequeath money and assets to daughters, and husbands to leave wealth to their widows. As a result, women in general began exercising financial agency. The Victorian confines of women’s domestic segregation, and the separate sphere of women as consumers rather than producers, began to lift. Women’s entrepreneurial agency and professional visibility marked what Canadian historian Peter Baskerville describes as “the largest redistribution of wealth since the takeover of Native [sic] lands by Europeans.”

Middle-class women’s improved economic agency rose alongside a groundswell of campaigns for women’s political voice in Canada, as in the United States and England. This first-wave feminist movement, observes social historian Ian McKay, threatened the Liberal order of Canadian society and its roots in European bourgeois patriarchy – an order in which male artists such as Clarence Gagnon, Franklin Brownell, and Paul Peel portrayed women decoratively as their muses (plates 63, 64, and 67). Women artists, meanwhile, envisioned female
11 PAUL PEEL
Luxembourg Gardens, Paris 1890

12 PAUL PEEL
The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris 1890

13 JAMES WILSON MORRICE
Luxembourg Gardens, Paris c. 1905
14  JAMES WILSON MORRICE  
The Omnibus c. 1900

15  JAMES WILSON MORRICE  
Quai des Grands-Augustins, Paris 1901
34 CLARENCE GAGNON  
*Summer Breeze at Dinard* c. 1907

35 HELEN McNICOLL  
*The Blue Sea (On the Beach at Saint-Malo)* c. 1914

36 JAMES WILSON MORRICE  
*Beach at Mers* c. 1898
54  GEORGE A. REID
City and Country 1893

55  PAUL PEEL
The Young Gleaner or The Butterflies 1888
70  W.H. CLAPP
Bird-nesting  c. 1909

71  HELEN MCNICOLL
The Apple Gatherer  c. 1911

72  H. MABEL MAY
Knitting  c. 1915
A Load of Fence Posts 1911

The Ice Harvest c. 1913
90 MAURICE CULLEN
Spring Break-up at Beaupré c. 1906

91 MARC-AURÈLE DE FOY SUZOR-COTÉ
A Thaw, March Evening, Arthabaska 1913

92 MARC-AURÈLE DE FOY SUZOR-COTÉ
Thaw, Arthabaska 1915
121  ARTHUR DOMINIQUE ROZAIRE
Winter, Sap Buckets, Quebec 1913

122  ROBERT PILOT
Saint Patrick’s Church, Montreal 1926

123  ROBERT PILOT
Waiting for the Ferry 1927
1926
Morison’s seminal paintings appeared in a memorial exhibition at Paris’ Galeries Simonson, January 9–23 (plates 10, 13, 15, and 44). Gagnon visited the installation and made detailed notes in his copy of the catalogue. He commented on the “very fine & fresh” colouring and urged the NGC to purchase some of the works. 264

*From January 30 to February 4* William Brymner was honoured with a Memorial Exhibition at the AAM in which Girl with a Dog, Lower Lawrencean and Champ-de-Mars, Winter were exhibited (plates 57 and 58). The exhibition was a testament to Brymner’s significant legacy both as an artist and as an instructor who left an indelible mark on his students. The Montreal Star reported: “It is almost hard, on first sight of the pictures, to grasp the fact that they are all the work of one man … [who spent] so much of his time in teaching … in every case he got something … well worth having.” 265

At the Art Gallery of Toronto, May 8–31, the sixth Group of Seven exhibition was paired with the Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture and Wood Carving of French Canada. This latter featured works by Suzor-Coté, Gagnon, Cullen, and Pilot, members of Montreal’s Beaver Hall Group (including Holgate, May, and Morris), and unnamed woodcarvers, spinners, and weavers. One reviewer contrasted the art of an earlier generation, such as Suzor-Coté’s Four and Sunlight, with that of the Group of Seven (plate 38). “If your nerves are unchoked to the color crescendos, landscape sublimities and sublimations of these shock troops of Canadian art, it will be well not to venture outside the sixth room, which is a florilegium of the soothing suavities of the French-Canadian masters.” It was a happy idea to exhibit the best of Quebec art side by side with the most daring of Ontario art … The masters … It was a happy idea to exhibit the best of Quebec art side by side with the most daring of Ontario art … The masters … It was a happy idea to exhibit the best of Quebec art side by side with the most daring of Ontario art … The masters … It was a happy idea to exhibit the best of Quebec art side by side with the most daring of Ontario art …

In early summer, anthropologist Marius Barbeau visited British Columbia with Holgate and Jackson. They sketched in Gitxsan territory, a region lauded by Barbeau as “the most inspiring, from the point of view of art, in the whole of British Columbia.” 266 Just as many artists found inspiration in the rural communities of France where the local inhabitants and their distinct costumes appeared untouched by modernity, so too in Canadian artists like Holgate were emboldened to depict Indigenous peoples as representatives of the “exotic,” the unknown “Other” (figures 11.38 and 11.39). 267

F.B. Housser published *A Canadian Art Movement*, the first comprehensive study of the Group of Seven. He positionned its members as a “new type of artist” capable of capturing the country’s distinct landscape without relying on European methods. 268 This cultural mythology, which still surrounds the Group, encouraged the development of a Canadian national identity.

1927
An exhibition of abstract paintings by Bertram Brooker opened at Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club on January 22 – Canada’s first solo exhibition of non-representational art. Though the exhibition is now considered a turning point in the history of Canadian abstraction, at the time it failed to resonate with the public, and even Brooker’s artist friends were critical: “Brooker show of metaphysical pictures on … Lack of titles to pictures a drawback with most. Picture based on phase in new World Symphony thought by must to be an underwater study of coral and sea anemones.” 269

Modern art from twenty-one countries appeared at the Toronto iteration of the International Exhibition of Modern Art Assembled by the Société Anonyme, April 1–24. Established in 1920 by Katherine Drever, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, the Société Anonyme was designed to encourage “the promotion of the study of the experimental in art … to conserve the vigour and vitality of the new expression of beauty in the art of to-day.” 270 Doomed at first to be “too revolutionary as yet for Toronto,” 271 Harris insisted that the exhibition appear at the Art Gallery of Toronto. Though still a member of the Group of Seven, his art had evolved conceptually; two of his paintings had been included in the previous installation of the exhibition in Brooklyn. After two years abroad Pilot established himself in Quebec as a successful painter of winter scenes, as in Waiting for the Ferry (plate 125). These urban subjects were prevalent among modernist artists including Morris, best known for her market and street scenes populated by horse-drawn sleighs, as in After “Grand Mass,” Berthier-en-Haut (plate 126). However, while Morris adopted a modernist style of bright colours, strong lines, and sculptural forms, Pilot’s style remained in- debted to Impressionist techniques disseminated by Cullen’s generation. The Exposition d’art canadien, organized by Brown and Gagnon, was on view at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris, from April 20 to May 10 (figure 11.40). Some works had been shown at the British Empire Exhibition in 1924 and 1925, but this exhibition also included memorial retrospectives to both Morrice and Thomson. Brown lauded efforts to develop a distinctly Canadian art: “It was necessary to make a vigorous and often painful effort to push the fine arts to the level of development they have now reached at home … this is why, in our time, a vibrant and truly national school of painting is finally beginning to emerge.” 272

In December the NGC hosted the Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern. The show paired historic artworks by Indigenous artists from Canada’s Northwest Coast with modern interpretations of the same subjects by artists such as Carr and Holgate (figure 11.42). 273 This exhibition marked Carr’s first critical success and introduced her to the work of the Group of Seven. Furthermore, it attempted to reposition Indigenous art as the historical roots of Canadian art. As Brown wrote: “A completely different history … reveals] that Canadian art can claim more distant ancestors than these military map makers.” 274 Although the exhibition recognized this rich artistic tradition, the language used in the catalogue and the concept of the exhibition itself continued to reinforce colonial stereotypes, especially the erroneous notion that Canada’s Indigenous cultures were disappearing and that efforts had to be made to preserve their art for posterity. 275

CHRONOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 30</td>
<td>William Brymner was honoured with a Memorial Exhibition at the AAM</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Girl with a Dog, Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>An exhibition of abstract paintings by Bertram Brooker opened</td>
<td>Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club</td>
<td>Waiting for the Ferry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 20</td>
<td>Modern art from twenty-one countries appeared in the International</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Société Anonyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>The Exposition d’art canadien was on view at the Musée du Jeu de</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Du Paume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>The NGC hosted the Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>Native and Modern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Julie Nash and Krista Broweeck

Purchased 2001 (40668)

37.1 × 28.6 cm. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

11.38 Edwin Holgate (1873–1932). Fête des filets bleus, Quebec, 1923. Oil on canvas. 46.7 × 73.2 cm. Art Gallery of Toronto

11.39 Edwin Holgate (1873–1932). Toron Fowl, Gaspé, Quebec, 1927. Oil on canvas. 46.7 × 39.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada Purchased 1935 (40647)

Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons casts off the enduring notions associated with French Impressionism by shedding light on the contributions of Canadian artists to this widespread movement. The first of its kind, this publication adds a new chapter to the history of World Impressionism as it positions the work of the Canadian Impressionists within the cosmopolitan milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Progressing from Impressionistic renderings of contemporary life to interpretations of reality through the lenses of Fauvism, Post-Impressionism, and subsequent modes of expression, Impressionism in Canada evolved into a form of modernity tailored to the spirit of a young nation.