

HAMMER

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: August 31, 2015

Contact: Nancy Lee, Manager, Public Relations, 310-443-7016, nlee@hammer.ucla.edu

Hammer Museum Presents First Major U.S. Exhibition of Canadian Artist Lawren Harris, Curated by Steve Martin

***The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris* on view October 11, 2015 – January 24, 2016**
Co-organized with the Art Gallery of Ontario



(Los Angeles, CA) — This October, the Hammer Museum debuts ***The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris***, the first major U.S. exhibition of paintings by Canadian artist Lawren Stewart Harris (1885-1970). Co-organized by the Hammer and the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto, the show is curated by **musician, actor and writer Steve Martin**. Martin is working in collaboration with **Cynthia Burlingham**, Deputy Director, Curatorial Affairs at the Hammer Museum, and **Andrew Hunter**, Fredrik S. Eaton Curator of Canadian Art at the AGO. On view at the Hammer Museum from **October 11, 2015 to January 24, 2016**, the exhibition will tour to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (March 12 – June 12, 2016) followed by the AGO (July 2 – September 11, 2016).

Though largely unknown in the United States, Lawren Harris was a founding member of the Canadian Group of Seven and a major figure in the history of twentieth-century Canadian art. The exhibition is comprised of more than **30 of Harris's most significant northern landscapes from the 1920s and 1930s**, drawn from major public and private collections across Canada including the AGO, the Thomson Collection at the AGO, the National Gallery of Canada, and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris* examines the defining period for the artist as a leading modernist painter, an innovator on par with contemporaries Marsden Hartley, Edward Hopper, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

Focusing on three main regions—the north shore of Lake Superior, the Rocky Mountains, and the Eastern Arctic—the paintings offer a bold “idea of north,” to borrow a phrase from musician and broadcaster Glenn Gould from which the exhibition draws its name. During the 1920s Harris progressed from a defiantly nationalistic interpretation of the northern landscape to a more universal

Images (L-R): Lawren Harris, *Lake Superior*, c. 1923. Oil on canvas 44 x 49 15/16 in. (111.8 x 126.9 cm). The Thomson Collection ©Art Gallery of Ontario; Lawren Harris, *North Shore*, 1926. Oil on canvas 40 1/4 x 50 1/8 in. (102.2 x 127.3 cm). National Gallery of Canada. Purchased 1930. ©Family of Lawren S. Harris. Photo ©NGC; Lawren Harris, *Mt. Lefroy*, 1930. Oil on canvas. 52.5 x 60.4 in. (133.5 x 153.5 cm), McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Purchase 1975. ©Family of Lawren S. Harris.

conception that saw the land as a source of inspiration for a clear and refined spiritual vision. Paintings such as *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926) and *Mt. Lefroy* (1930) remain haunting and clear statements of an individual striving to transcend the surface to a more profound reality.

Writing in the exhibition catalogue, **Steve Martin describes the significance** of this period of Harris's career: "A painter of the backwoods and the streets of Toronto, Harris went by boxcar, boat, and boot to the Canadian north, and it provided his work with the necessary elevation. He stopped making scenes of shady lanes and streets with strolling couples, and almost every living thing vanished from his pictures. He now began a series of paintings that achieved—then surpassed—his dream of a national art of Canada. But these new scenes, devoid of life except for the occasional mossy plain, are not dead. The absence of organic things in the mountains, lakes, and icebergs he now painted created a paradoxical effect: the pictures came to life."

"When Steve Martin first introduced us to Lawren Harris's paintings, I was struck by their astonishing beauty and surprised by how virtually unknown this Canadian artist is in the U.S.," said **Ann Philbin, Director of the Hammer Museum**. "Following in the tradition of artist-curated exhibitions like Robert Gober's Charles Burchfield exhibition and the ongoing Houseguest series, we invited Steve to apply his deep knowledge of twentieth-century art to introduce an American audience to Harris's work."

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with essays by Steve Martin, Cynthia Burlingham, Andrew Hunter, and Karen E. Quinn, senior historian and curator, art and culture at the New York State Museum, Albany. Published by DelMonico Books-Prestel, the monograph includes an artist chronology and extensive bibliography.

###

ABOUT LAWREN HARRIS

Lawren Stewart Harris was born on October 23, 1885 in Brantford, Ontario. The scion of a wealthy family, Harris grew up in a progressive yet pious household. Harris's early training took place in Berlin between 1904 and 1907, where he studied with the academic painters Fritz von Wille, Adolf Schlabitz, and Franz Skarbina and first encountered transcendental philosophy. When Harris returned to Canada in early 1908 he established himself as painter of both landscapes and urban views, attempting to synthesize a socially-conscious, internationally-relevant but still distinctly Canadian modernist idiom. Harris also served as an active supporter and patron of the arts throughout his career, first as an early member of the Arts and Letters Club and as co-founder of the Studio Building which opened in Toronto in 1914.

Harris developed an international reputation during the spring of 1920, when he exhibited along with longtime associates Franklin Carmichael, A.Y. Jackson, Frank (later Franz) Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. (Jim) MacDonald, and Frederick Varley as a founding member of the "Group of Seven." The group's inaugural exhibition toured eleven US cities, garnering admittedly mixed reviews from local critics but cementing these artists' central place in the history of North America modernism. Over the course of the next decade, Canada's northern wilderness, which Harris frequently visited on periodic sketching trips, became central to Harris's conception of himself as a landscape painter.

Harris met the painter Emily Carr, an ardent friend and supporter, in November 1927; during this period he also expressed increasing concern over the role abstraction would play in his future work. Harris continued to visit and paint different locations throughout the latter part of the 1920s, including Yoho National Park, Mount

Robson National Park, and Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies, creating paintings described by his critics as spectacular “epics of solitude, chaos, and snow.”¹ Looking for new forms of landscape, Harris traveled to the arctic as a guest of the Canadian government in 1930.

The early 1930s were a period of transition in Harris’s life and work. In 1931 the final Group of Seven exhibition took place; in 1933 Harris became the founding president of the more aesthetically diverse Canadian Group of Painters. In the fall of 1934, Harris left Canada for New England, where he dedicated himself exclusively to abstract painting. Moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1938, Harris became an important member of the incipient Trancendental Painting Group, which held its first exhibition in April 1939. When Harris finally returned to Canada in the mid 1940s, he was regarded as an elder statesman of Canadian art, becoming the first artist to serve on the board of the National Gallery in Ottawa and the first Canadian to be accorded a retrospective at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) in 1948. Harris never stopped sketching in the mountains, even continuing to make treks in the Rockies until concerns for his wife’s health forced him to stop. The final decade of Harris’s life was marked by intermittent heart problems; he continued to paint abstract canvases as his health permitted. Harris died on January 29, 1970, just four months after the loss of his wife.

CREDIT

The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris is co-organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and curated by Steve Martin in collaboration with Cynthia Burlingham, Deputy Director, Curatorial Affairs, Hammer Museum, and Andrew Hunter, Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario.

The Hammer Museum's presentation is made possible by a generous gift from Manuela Herzer and the Herzer Foundation.

RELATED HAMMER PROGRAMS

Steve Martin & Adam Gopnik

Monday, October 5, 7:30 p.m.

Exhibition curator Steve Martin discusses Lawren Harris with the essayist and staff writer for *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik.

Exhibition Tours

Sunday, October 25, 2 p.m. & 2:45 p.m.

Cynthia Burlingham, deputy director of curatorial affairs, Hammer Museum, leads two walkthroughs of the exhibition.

ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum at UCLA offers collections, exhibitions, and programs that span the classic to the contemporary in art, architecture, and design. The Hammer’s international exhibition program focuses on wide-ranging thematic and monographic exhibitions, highlighting contemporary art since the 1960s and the work of emerging artists through Hammer Projects and the Hammer’s biennial, *Made in L.A.* As a cultural center, the Hammer Museum offers nearly 300 free public programs a year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music performances at the Billy Wilder Theater which also houses the UCLA Film & Television Archive. The Hammer is home of the Armand Hammer Collection of American and European paintings, as well as the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection and the Hammer Contemporary Collection. The Hammer Contemporary Collection focuses on art of all media since

¹ Quoted in James King, *Inward Journey: The Life of Lawren Harris*, Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2012: 209.

1960 with an emphasis on works of the last ten years, works on paper, and art made in Los Angeles. The museum also houses the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts—comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present—and oversees the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA. Free admission to the Hammer Museum is made possible through the generosity of benefactors Erika J. Glazer and Brenda R. Potter.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free.

Visit www.hammer.ucla.edu for current exhibition and program information and call (310) 443-7041 for tours.

Hours: Tuesday – Friday 11 a.m. – 8 p.m., Saturday & Sunday 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. Closed Mondays and national holidays. The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood, Los Angeles. Parking is available onsite for \$3 (maximum 3 hours) or for a \$3 flat rate after 6 p.m.

###