



Higher States: Lawren Harris and His American Contemporaries

Roald Nasgaard, Gwendolyn Owens

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Lawren S. Harris is best known for his iconic landscape paintings that declare a sense of cool Canadian resilience. Yet, in the 1920s, an audacious and more colourful interior world began to emerge in his work, and by 1934, the patriotic landscape painter had taken a seemingly unexpected turn toward a transnational career in abstract painting.

The social, intellectual, and aesthetic milieu of American transcendentalism shaped a movement of abstract art across North America, seen in the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, Katherine Dreier, Raymond Jonson, and Lawren Harris. Harris, in particular, made an impact on both sides of the border. Inspired by the ideas of Kandinsky and informed by the writings of Emerson and Whitman, Harris and his contemporaries turned to abstraction to express higher states of consciousness, creating work that was the very embodiment of the modern spirit.

As Harris's career progressed, as he ascended from mountaintops to inner states of mind, he sought greater and more ethereal spiritual heights. This magnificent volume features reproductions of more than 75 paintings by Harris and his contemporaries. Two major essays by Roald Nasgaard and Gwendolyn Owens investigate Lawren Harris's exploration of modernity and the evolution of his work towards a form of abstraction that enthusiastically embraced the energies of the ambient visual culture.

Higher States: Lawren Harris and His American Contemporaries accompanies an exhibition organized by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection that will open in February 2017, and travel to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in October 2017.

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