

Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo



Places of Their Own
Highlights from the Exhibition

Organized and circulated by the
McMichael Canadian Art Collection

On the cover :

◀ **Frida Kahlo**
Sol y Vida, 1947
oil on masonite
Private lender

Kahlo's depiction of plant forms often reflects her preoccupation with fertility. The plants suggest the body, while the weeping fetus contained in the leaves may suggest her unrealized desire to have a child. The veins in the leaves reach down like roots, a common image in her work. For Kahlo, roots symbolized death and regeneration and a connection to the past.

◀ **Georgia O'Keeffe**
Red Hills with the Pedernal, 1936
oil on linen
Museum of New Mexico,
Museum of Fine Arts
Bequest of Helen Miller Jones, 1986

The Pedernal is a flat-topped mesa, visible from O'Keeffe's house at Ghost Ranch. The landscape of the Southwest remained a longstanding source of inspiration for O'Keeffe's paintings. She understood that some saw the landscape as unrelenting badlands, saying, "a red hill doesn't touch everyone's heart as it touches mine" (in O'Keeffe 1977). This painting, like many of O'Keeffe's landscapes, suggests the human form through its curves and colour.

◀ **Emily Carr**
Big Raven, 1931
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery,
Emily Carr Trust
Photo:
Trevor Mills

Carr developed this painting from a watercolour made at Cumshewa, Haida Gwaii [Queen Charlotte Islands] almost twenty years earlier. Her memory of the place was so strong that she felt compelled to revisit and reinterpret the subject. In her journals, she wrote of *Big Raven*: "I want to bring a great loneliness to this canvas and a haunting broodiness, quiet and powerful" (in Carr 1966, 27). The landscape and the sky are sculptural, seemingly solid, and assume an imposing weight equal to that of the huge wooden bird.

This exhibition brings together for the first time the work of painters Emily Carr (1871-1945), Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) and Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), artists widely appreciated as the outstanding twentieth-century women painters of their respective countries.

That stature is based on their unique abilities to identify with their nationality, their cultures, and the natural world. Their creative lives show unusual efforts to define themselves individually as well as culturally.

Sharyn Udall,
Guest Curator

This self-guided tour gives you the opportunity to explore key works in the exhibition. The reproductions in this brochure will help you to find the paintings in the gallery. Text panels and extended labels will also help you to learn more about the artists and their work.



Emily Carr
A Haida Village, c. 1929
 oil on canvas
 McMichael Canadian Art
 Collection
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs.
 M. Stern, Dominion
 Gallery, Montreal

This period marked a new beginning for Carr after years of painting very little. In her early paintings of native subjects, Carr's approach had been documentary – she sought to record accurately what she saw as a disappearing culture. However here, inspired by modernist ideas, she attempted to capture the spirit of the place by simplifying details, and by using strong shapes and deep, subdued colours. While the buildings and poles are monumental, the forest is no longer simply a background; it has a massive, enveloping presence.



Emily Carr
The Mountain, 1933
 oil on canvas
 McMichael Canadian
 Art Collection
 Gift of Dr. and Mrs.
 M. Stern, Dominion
 Gallery, Montreal

Carr chose to set aside images of totem poles and First Nations villages and focus on the landscape. In May 1933, she set out on a painting trip to the mountains north of Vancouver. There she painted the mountains at close range so that they fill the canvas with a massive, looming presence. She struggled to capture the “dominating strength and spirit brooding” (in Carr 1966, 46) in the landscape, yet the undulating, rhythmic style seems more spontaneous and liberated than the solid, designed forms of her work from a few years earlier.



Georgia O'Keeffe
Kokopelli with Snow, 1942
 oil on board
 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
 Gift of The Burnett
 Foundation and the
 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

O'Keeffe made a number of paintings of *kachinas* in the 1930s and 1940s. These dolls, made by the Hopi and Zuni carvers of the Southwest, represent supernatural beings. O'Keeffe's depiction of *kachinas* indicates her interest in native cultures, and also suggests her desire to paint uniquely American images. However, like Emily Carr, she eventually questioned the originality of representing another culture's art and religious objects and focused her attention on subjects with more personal resonance.



Georgia O'Keeffe
Pelvis Series, 1947
 oil on canvas
 Collection of
 Lee E. Dirks

O'Keeffe described animal bones as symbols of the desert and found them “strangely more living than the animals walking around” (in Eldredge 1993, 121). Her subject matter drawn from the harsh landscape of the Southwest expressed duality. The bones could symbolize death, yet in them she saw beauty and vitality. In this series, O'Keeffe focused on the abstract qualities of shape and negative space within the bones. As she remarked, “I like empty spaces. Holes can be very expressive” (in Eldredge 1993, 205).



Frida Kahlo
Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky, 1937
 oil on masonite
 National Museum of Women in the Arts
 Gift of the Honorable Clare Boothe Luce

Diego Rivera secured asylum for Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his wife in 1937, and Kahlo lent them her house. This self-portrait is one of many that Kahlo made as gifts for friends. Kahlo and Trotsky had a brief affair and, as the letter she holds indicates, she dedicated this painting to him “with all love.” Kahlo usually wore traditional *Tehuana* clothing, however in this painting she wears aristocratic clothing, a choice that seemingly would not have met with Trotsky’s approval.



Frida Kahlo
Self-Portrait with Monkey, 1938
 oil on masonite
 Albright-Knox Museum,
 Buffalo, New York
 Bequest of A. Conger
 Goodyear, 1966

Kahlo painted dozens of self-portraits, through which she revealed and dealt with the physical pain and mental anguish that often plagued her. Frequently, she pictured herself with monkeys, several of which she kept as pets. As her pets, the monkeys served as surrogate children, but she also knew that they were symbols of lust in both Mayan and European traditions. Although she rarely painted landscapes, thick anthropomorphized vegetation forms the backdrop in many self-portraits.

Suggested Reading

Carr, Emily. *Hundred and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist*. Toronto; Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin Co. 1966

Eldredge, Charles C. *Georgia O’Keeffe*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers 1991

Eldredge, Charles C. *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern*. New Haven; London: Yale University 1993

Herrera, Hayden. *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*. New York: HarperPerennial 1993

Laurence, Robin. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 1996

Lindauer, Margaret. *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo*. New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press 1999

O’Keeffe, Georgia. *Georgia O’Keeffe*. New York: Viking Press 1976

Richmond, Robin. *Frida Kahlo in Mexico*. San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks 1994

Shadbolt, Doris. *The Art of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 1979

Udall, Sharyn. *Carr, O’Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press 2000

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