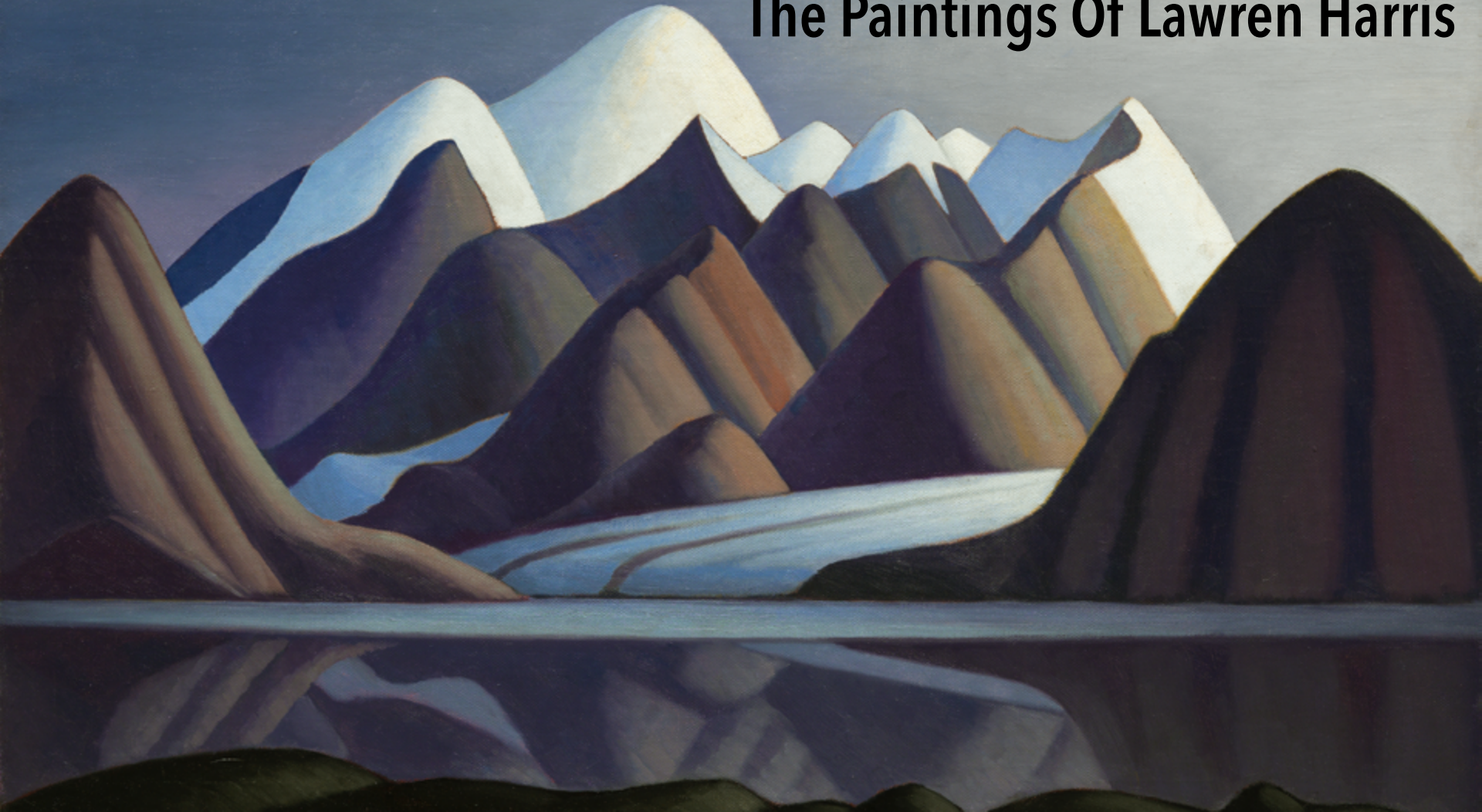


The Idea Of North

The Paintings Of Lawren Harris



By Stephen May

LOS ANGELES, CALIF – Americans know shamefully little about the art of Canada. Yet over the years our neighbor to the north has produced a number of gifted artists who deserve to be better known. Case in point: Lawren Harris (1885–1970), a skilled painter of the frozen, wintry northland, a founding member of the Canadian Group of Seven and, eventually, a pioneering abstractionist.

The first major US exhibition of works by Harris, “The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris,” is on view at the Hammer Museum at UCLA through January 24, and will tour thereafter. Co-organized by the Hammer and the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto, the show is curated by actor and entertainer Steve Martin in collaboration with Cynthia Burlingham, deputy director of curatorial



“North Shore, Lake Superior,” 1926. National Gallery of Canada, purchased 1930. ©Family of Lawren S. Harris. Photo ©NGC.

Page Above: “Mount Thule, Bylot Island,” 1930. Vancouver Art Gallery Women’s Auxiliary. ©Family of Lawren S. Harris.



“Harris is truly worthy and Americans need to know more about him,” says guest curator Steve Martin.

affairs at the Hammer, and Andrew Hunter, curator of Canadian art at AGO. The exhibition comprises more than 30 of Harris’s most important northern landscapes from the 1920s and 1930s.

Martin is an avid collector and promoter of Harris’s work. He has no doubts about the artist’s importance: “Harris is truly worthy and Americans need to know more about him.” He added, “Harris is the only artist I could conceive of getting involved with as a curator, and this is a time when my celebrity face might actually do the world some good.”

Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin observed that when Martin introduced her to Harris’s paintings she was “struck by their astonishing beauty and surprised by how little awareness I had of the work and its importance to the history of Twentieth Century Modernism.”

Welcoming the show, AGO director and chief executive officer Matthew Teitelbaum observed that the display includes Harris's "most majestic works ... that are truly alive. This alone will serve to build a platform for Canadian art on the world stage in a manner reflecting our great desire to celebrate the land that binds us."

Harris was born into a well-to-do family in Brantford, Ontario. He grew up in a progressive but pious household. At the age of 19, Harris traveled to Berlin, where he studied for three years with academic painters and first encountered transcendental philosophy.

Returning to Canada in 1908, he continued to paint landscapes and urban views, seeking to develop a socially conscious, internationally relevant but distinctly Canadian manner. For several years, he



**Bold shafts of light highlight "Lake Superior," circa 1923.
The Thomson Collection ©Art Gallery of Canada.**



concentrated on renderings of streetscapes in older and poorer sections of Toronto and small Ontario towns. He was an active supporter and patron of the arts throughout his career. In 1910, Harris married Beatrice "Trixie" Phillips, who became the mother of their three children.

The genesis of the celebrated Group of Seven is unclear. Many credit Harris with providing the stimulus for the Group, dating to 1912 when he traveled to Buffalo to see an exhibition of contemporary Scandinavian painting...

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Lawren Harris on the *SS Beothic*, eastern Arctic, photographer unknown, 1930.

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