

EXHIBITIONS

North America previews

At one with nature: in praise of Emily Carr

The Canadian painter is the subject of a major show of her landscapes at the Vancouver Art Gallery. By **Hadani Ditmars**

MODERN ART

VANCOUVER. A sweeping exhibition of Emily Carr's landscapes, depicting her native British Columbia, will open this month at the Vancouver Art Gallery. *That Green Ideal: Emily Carr and the Idea of Nature* will feature work primarily from the museum's collection – the most comprehensive holdings of her work in the world – and draw on the strengths of a small exhibition last year curated by the museum's Richard Hill, which explored spatial metaphor in the Canadian artist's landscapes.

"I think Carr is a remarkable Modernist landscape painter who has been largely overlooked in the wider history of Modernism," Hill says. "Her intense commitment to art, despite sexist assumptions about her potential as a woman artist and her geographic isolation from the mainstream art world, are a story I think many people would find fascinating if given a chance to hear it and see the work."

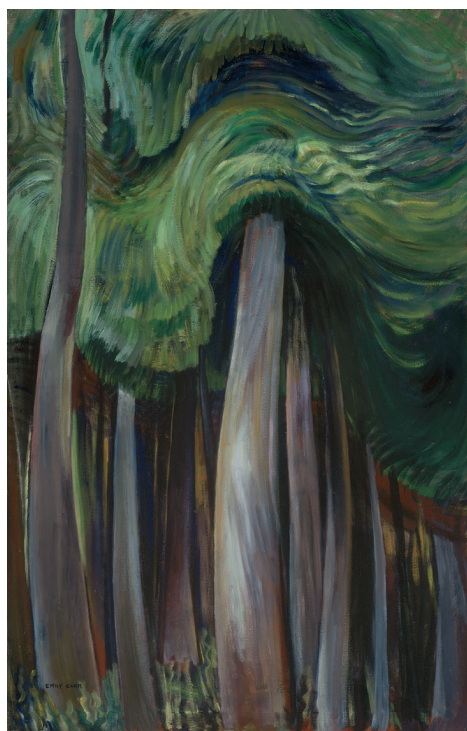
Carr "was both a careful observer and someone who sought spiritual transcendence in communion with nature", according to a press statement. The artist once termed it "that green ideal", which has inspired the show's title. Carr often wrote about this process in her journals, excerpts of which will be featured in the exhibition.

Fauvist-inspired palette

Born in Victoria in 1871, Carr studied art in both San Francisco and London before later spending time in France, where she developed a distinctive post-Impressionist style with a Fauvist-inspired palette, which would define much of her later work.

In 1912 Carr undertook an ambitious sketching trip to the Haida Gwaii islands, off the coast of British Columbia, where she created a significant body of watercolours and canvases. According to the museum, these works fused her French training "with her deep engagement with the monumental forms of totem poles and village sites". But a subsequent exhibition met with a mixed reception and Carr set aside painting for almost 15 years while she ran a boarding house in the city of Victoria. Carr's professional resurrection came in 1927, after the inclusion of her work in the *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern* at the National Gallery of Canada and recognition from the Group of Seven, a Canadian collective of landscape painters.

The Vancouver show will also include key works on paper from a period when Carr was developing a new approach after meeting the Group of Seven. "One of the challenges of Carr's mature practice is how many important works are on paper and have to be limited in their exposure to light," Hill



Works such as *Forest* (1931-33, above) highlight Emily Carr's affinity with the nature of British Columbia

says. "In particular, we have an amazing collection of charcoal drawings that we don't often get to show, and over the course of the exhibition we'll get almost all of them on display." The gallery will change the display halfway through the run of the show, to limit light exposure. "They are stunning," Hill adds. "Likewise, the very expressive paintings on paper she did later in her career, mixing oil paint with gasoline to create a very fluid style," which will also be shown.

Hill says that recent criticism from the Haida scholar Marcia Crosby, of Carr's conflation of Indigenous culture with nature, will also be included in the exhibition. The show will examine "the sources of this idea in the Modernist primitivism/vitalism that she was exposed to in France and then via [the Canadian artist] Lawren Harris and [the anthropologist] Marius Barbeau". Hence, Hill says, "the change in her final works from attempting to achieve spatial proximity to nature to imagining herself at one with nature".

• *That Green Ideal: Emily Carr and the Idea of Nature*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 6 February-8 November

Mirikitani, the artist forged through adversity

LAWRENCE, KS. Largely under recognised during his lifetime, the US artist Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani (1920-2012) is earning his due in the largest presentation of his work to date, at the Spencer Museum of Art in Kansas. Spanning drawing, collage and mixed media, *Street Nihonga: The Art of Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani* will highlight a life and creative practice transformed by displacement, trauma and resilience.

Born in Sacramento in 1920 and raised in Hiroshima, Mirikitani trained in *Nihonga*, or Japanese-style painting, before returning to the US in 1940. Throughout his life, Mirikitani faced significant adversities, including wartime incarceration for having Japanese ancestry, and homelessness. Against this backdrop, his creative output flourished as a way to survive amid periods of global and personal crisis. Mirikitani's work became a form of self-determination as he worked through trauma, depicting scenes ranging from the burning World Trade Center buildings to colourful landscapes and portraits of cats. Mirikitani brought Japanese aesthetics to the streets, and created art in public parks, often collaborating with neighbours and strangers.

"Mirikitani's work feels urgently relevant today," says the exhibition's co-curator, Maki Kaneko. "His art speaks directly to issues that continue to shape our world – racism, migration, statelessness, war and homelessness – yet it does

so through deeply personal and interpersonal forms. In a moment when society feels increasingly divided, Mirikitani's practice offers a powerful model of art as connection, dialogue and shared coexistence."

Mirikitani died in 2012 and, while he was not widely known during his lifetime, he gained visibility in 2006 with the documentary *The Cats of Mirikitani*, in which the film-maker Linda Hattendorf gave the then-unhoused Mirikitani shelter and helped him find stable housing. The exhibition draws mainly from Hattendorf's collection. Though Mirikitani's work does not often appear on the secondary market, he is in a handful of museum collections, including the Spencer Museum and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

"The Spencer Museum has a long commitment to global Modern and contemporary art, works on paper and Asian art histories, but this exhibition allows us to rethink those categories together," says the co-curator Kris Ercums. "Today, there is a growing recognition that Mirikitani's art demands a more serious reassessment. He is increasingly understood not simply as a 'self-taught' or 'outsider' artist, but as a deeply intentional maker."

The museum hopes visitors will approach the exhibition with an open mind and see Mirikitani's work as a form of expression born in the unstable spaces between nations, conflict and communities.

"The exhibition does not ask viewers to arrive at a specific takeaway or resolution, but to enter into a process – to look closely, make connections, and reflect on how meaning is formed through collaboration and encounter," Kaneko says. "What each visitor takes away may differ, and that openness is very much in the spirit of Mirikitani's practice."

Annabel Keenan

• *Street Nihonga: The Art of Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani*, Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas, 19 February-28 June



Untitled (*World Trade Center and Kannon*) (after 2001) by Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani



His art speaks directly to issues that continue to shape our world

Maki Kaneko, co-curator

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