



Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson

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A.Y. Jackson is the man often regarded as the leading advocate for the Group. Born in Montreal, Jackson was forced to earn a living at an early age when his father abandoned the family of six children. A.Y. went to work as an office boy for a lithograph company, where he received his earliest training. In 1905, at the age of 23, he worked his way to Europe on a cattle boat, and then back to Chicago where he worked in a commercial art firm. By 1907 he had saved enough money to return to France to study Impressionism. There, Jackson decided to become a professional painter.

When Jackson returned to Canada he settled in Sweetsburg, Quebec and began producing works such as *The Edge of Maple Wood*. He struggled in Quebec for several years, and considered a move to the United States, as he was becoming more and more discouraged by the art situation in Canada. Before Jackson was able to move, he received a letter that was to change the course of Canadian art. A Toronto based artist by the name of J.E.H. MacDonald wrote to Jackson enquiring about a painting he had seen at a Toronto showing several years earlier. It was Jackson's *The Edge of Maple Wood*. In his letter, MacDonald said that if Jackson still owned the painting, another Toronto artist by the name of Lawren Harris wished to purchase it. This letter and purchase provided the link between Jackson and the Toronto based artists. They continued correspondence and debate over the Canadian art situation, and soon Jackson began spending extended periods of time in Toronto.

A.Y. Jackson was involved in all the major Group trips to Algonquin Park, Georgian Bay, Algoma and the North Shore. He was a rugged individual and some felt that Jackson had a romantic need to prove himself by undergoing great hardships. He became great friends with Tom Thomson, and they spent much time outdoors fishing and sketching. In 1913, Harris talked Jackson into spending the entire summer painting around Georgian Bay. Dr. McCallum then offered use of his cottage and one year free expenses as well as use of a room in the Studio Building.

When war came, Jackson was the only member to see action and was wounded soon after he reached the front. Later, he worked for the Canadian War Memorials. In 1925 he taught at the Ontario College of Art (OCA), in Toronto, the only time in 30 years that he missed travelling home to Quebec for Spring. This is really where his heart and best paintings were based.

A.Y. Jackson's works and personality were immensely popular. He was direct and easy to understand, both in his painting and as a person. He was an outward looking artist, whose main concern was to record the landscape before him and reveal Canada to Canadians.