

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ***Newly Gathered Research Contributes to New Understanding of “Group of Seven” Sketches***

***Vancouver Art Gallery assembles a unique blend of art-historical and scientific research on ten contested painted sketches.***



***December 15 2023, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.***

The Vancouver Art Gallery is set to open its doors to a fascinating and thought-provoking exhibition, *J.E.H. MacDonald? A Tangled Garden*. Opening on December 16, 2023, this exhibition unravels some of the mysteries surrounding ten previously unknown painted sketches attributed to J.E.H. MacDonald, a respected figure among Canada’s renowned Group of Seven. The Group of Seven are among Canada’s most acclaimed and historically celebrated Modern artists, known primarily for their role in building a narrative of Canada’s national identity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The journey began in 2015 when the Vancouver Art Gallery made headlines by announcing the gift of these ten elusive sketches. Attributed to J.E.H. MacDonald at the time, the excitement surrounding the discovery was palpable. However, experts in the wider arts community began to publicly raise questions about the authenticity of the works. As a result, the Gallery postponed a planned exhibition to take the time to delve deeper into the matter. This included bringing in leading art historians, handwriting experts and the scientific resources of the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI).

*“J.E.H. MacDonald? A Tangled Garden* reflects our commitment to research, artistic inquiry and sharing new knowledge with our communities,” said **Anthony Kiendl, CEO & Executive Director of the**

**Vancouver Art Gallery.** “We invite the public to explore this fascinating story, which reveals the complexities that occur when art history and science connect. The Gallery seeks to foster an environment of critical inquiry and transparency in which our audiences participate in the discourse surrounding the meaning of these artworks.”

Based on the results of subject matter experts, including research conducted by the CCI, the Gallery is announcing that the ten painted sketches will no longer be attributed to J.E.H. MacDonald—but rather, to an unknown painter.

“This investigation exemplifies how scientific examination can play an important role in the understanding and preservation of cultural heritage,” said **Kate Helwig, Senior Conservation Scientist at the Canadian Conservation Institute.** “The CCI’s findings were crucial to the conclusive outcome of the investigation, which has led to the revised attribution of these ten painted sketches.”

*J.E.H. MacDonald? A Tangled Garden* invites visitors to explore the meticulous process of this investigation. Key highlights of the exhibition include a detailed presentation of the CCI's soon-to-be-published findings. Scientific research is further supported by art historical research, including visual analysis, and the discernment of experts in the field who have studied works by MacDonald and the Group of Seven for many years. The exhibition brings together these quantitative and qualitative assessments in a fascinating ensemble—allowing visitors to examine the evidence and draw their own conclusions. All told, the exhibition provides a fascinating view into the world of art history, providing the public with opportunities to hone their own skills of art appreciation and knowledge of art.

“This exhibition provides our visitors a rare opportunity to peek behind the scenes and see how we do the work we do, and the passion and dedication of everyone involved,” said **Richard Hill, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art.**

To provide a broader context, the exhibition will feature a significant installation of securely attributed oil sketches by the Group of Seven, including by J.E.H. MacDonald, drawn from the Gallery's permanent collection. These oil sketches, appreciated for their freshness, energy and vibrant colours, will offer a glimpse into the artistic process of Group of Seven members, who often created preliminary painted sketches in the field before completing larger, finished paintings in their studios.

*J.E.H. MacDonald? A Tangled Garden* opens on December 16, 2023, and will be on view until May 12, 2024.

Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Richard Hill, Smith Jarislowsky Senior Curator of Canadian Art.

A book entitled *J.E.H. MacDonald Up Close: The Artist’s Materials and Techniques* will be released later today, published by Goose Lane Editions. Authored by Kate Helwig of the CCI and Alison Douglas of the McMichael, it describes the results of their in-depth examination of MacDonald’s oil sketches and paintings. An advance reader copy is available to media upon request.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit

<https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/jeh-macdonald-tangled-garden>.

**IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**

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Image: Unknown, Sketch after *The Tangled Garden*, n.d. oil on paperboard Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery

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## **ABOUT VANCOUVER ART GALLERY**

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's celebrated exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region—through the Institute of Asian Art founded in 2014. The Gallery's

exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliiwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and to the work of the Gallery.

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