



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

School of Art
Gallery

255 ARTlab, 180 Dafoe Rd
Winnipeg, MB
204.474.9367
www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art

Hours:
Mon - Fri: 10 AM - 4 PM
Closed on holidays

Caroline Maas
Frogs A, 1973
Lithograph, 45/ 257
37.6 x 26.2cm
Collection of the
School of Art Gallery



FEATURING WORKS BY:

David Becker

H. Eric Bergman

Bruno Bobak

Jack Butler

O.M. Curry

Ivan Eyre

June Falk

Valentine Fanshaw

Gerald Ferguson

L. LeMoine Fitzgerald

Suzanne Gauthier

John Harper

J. Hudson

Eli Inukpaluk

Goyce Kakegamic

Joshim Kakegamic

Pauloosie Karpik

Alex Keno

Kenneth Lochhead

Edwin Landseer

Caroline Maas

Michael Morris

David Munro

Robert Nelson

Toni Onley

Christopher Pratt

Donald Reichert

Jack Shadbolt

Arnold Shives

Ann Smith

George Swinton

Jack Sures

School of Art Gallery
Main Gallery

FOREST ENCOUNTERS

ORGANIZED BY JAMIE WRIGHT

NOV. 20 - JAN. 18, 2018

FOREST ENCOUNTERS:

THOUGHTS & THEMES ON ART & THE FOREST

AN ESSAY BY GENEVIEVE FARRELL

Forest Encounters positions the forest as a physical and social environment that has preoccupied many artists across genres and generations. Contemplating the forest as a universal source of symbolism and a wellspring for interpretation, the exhibition juxtaposes the work of over twenty artists from the School of Art Gallery's permanent collection including: Ontario artists Joshim and Goyce Kakegamic, Manitoba artists Ann Smith and Alex Keno, Inuit sculptor Pauloosie Karpik, and many others.

Together with the fields, tundra, mountains, and bodies of water, the vast and varying landscape has impacted immensely upon the development of Canada as a nation, and in turn, its peoples' sense of nationhood and self. As an engine of the Canadian economy, especially throughout the 1940's and 50's, the lumber industry drew from the forest to produce goods for monetary gain. Giving life to innumerable national symbols and clichés including the lumberjack, the maple syrup producer, the beaver, bear, moose and goose, the idea of the Canadian forest has inspired

many real, exaggerated, and outright fictional narratives. Capturing equally the imagination of those born into more densely populated areas of the globe, artists from abroad have documented and formulated images representing varying ideas of what might lie within a forest that remains untouched by human activity and regulation. Winnie-the-Pooh's "Hundred Acre Wood", Narnia's "Wood Between the Worlds", The Lord of the Rings' "Fangorn Forest", the Grimm Brother's "Black Forest" and countless other "Enchanted Forests" created for films, books, music, the visual arts, have informed human culture since our early days.

In Canada, the forest and its creatures feature prominently throughout souvenir and airport shops, with images reproduced on fridge magnets, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and posters. With works by the Group of Seven still grossing top sales within the international Canadian art market, commercial art galleries and the Canadian art cannon itself remain deeply connected to, and perhaps even reliant upon national narratives hinged on notions

of an "untouched" wilderness. In so many ways, the very idea of the forest has endured as much commodification as the actual physical forest itself. Indeed, if an artist wishes to readily sell their work, there is no better genre to turn to than that of the landscape. Some of the artworks featured in *Forest Encounters* provide excellent examples of this. David Munroe's wood carved loons are reminiscent of objects one might purchase from an upscale gift shop, located on the edge of a remote cottage community. And the paintings of Valentine Fanshaw, an English artist who immigrated to Winnipeg in the early 1900's, could easily be adapted for print on calendars, postcards and mass-produced canvases. Flowers and fields, woodland creatures and waterfalls, humans seem to be in universal agreement about the beauty of certain things. Why is it that these images are so appealing to the vast majority of us?

Beyond visual and contemporary tastes, it seems as though certain images and themes never to go out of fashion. While the impacts of capitalism upon the art market can seem dismaying, what is popular and marketable has much to reveal about the human experience of beauty and taste. It is a phenomenon that can in part be understood through the study of biological evolution. Symmetry, the golden ratio, and fractal patterns grounded in nature (a snail shell, flower head, butterfly wing, or even ocean waves) provide visual identifiers that have helped our ancestors survive. A deer with large

symmetrical antlers is probably a healthy source of meat, whereas a wheat crop with deformations may not be. As a part of our survival makeup, these healthy visual signifiers actually activate the reward center in our brains. The experience of beauty can therefore, at least in part, be explained as a chemical reaction that is produced when we recognize these patterns.

Entering the cultural and political realm of images and image making, *Forest Encounters* is much more than the presentation of beautiful objects and images. The forest, and romanticized notions of "naturalness" go far beyond the simple experience of beauty in modern times. With Canada's colonial history deeply entangled with that of aesthetic and narrative appropriations, *Forest Encounters* also offers a space to reflect upon the fraught history of Indigenous art making. The story of the Kakegamic brothers is a case in point. Founding the "Triple-K Co-Operative" in 1973 in the town of Red Lake, Ontario, the Kakegamic brothers responded to a grave lack of space and support for Indigenous artists working in the 1970's. Grounded in notions of artistic control, self-representation, and self-determination, at a time when Indigenous artists and artwork remained largely excluded from or even exploited by mainstream arts communities. The Triple-K and other groups such as Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporated (a.k.a The Indian Group of Seven) set important work in motion that has contributed to both the preservation and control over Indigenous heritage. Ongoing and

prevalent theft of Indigenous imagery made it necessary for the Kakegamic brothers to hire a copyright lawyer in 1975. With Indigenous designs being stolen and marketed cheaply as "Canadian art" in commercial settings such as airports and gift shops, having legal assistance helped the artist-run silk screen Co-Operative navigate vital aspects of the art market such as distribution, royalties, and reproduction laws.

In a 1978 interview, Goyce relayed his story of having grown up painting landscapes, a genre he enjoyed immensely, but eventually abandoned when he realized there would be no place for him in the professional art market. Working under the influence of his brother-in-law Norval Morrisseau, Goyce and his brother Joshim began to produce artworks depicting the legends and myths of the Ojibway people. As seen in Goyce's *The Flight* and Joshim's *Moose*, the use of primary colors and carefully planned graphic line work define the brother's instantly recognizable visual vocabulary.

The artworks throughout *Forest Encounters* range from figurative to abstract, from documentary to imaginary, two-dimensional works on paper to soapstone, wood, and whalebone sculptures. In each case, land and animal are considered as a raw material for creative interpretation. And the forest, whether urban or outlying, filtered with light or darkened under the shadows, provides a setting in which mysterious creatures lurk,

secret lovers meet, hermits stow away, and many other weird and wonderful adventures take place. It is also the setting from which many past and present social, cultural and political circumstances can be unpacked, yet simultaneously a space of beauty that unifies humanity through its shared development as a species. An imagined utopia, or the edge of a dangerous threshold separating wilderness from civilization, the idea of the forest will surely continue to be interpreted and re-interpreted by artists in endless forms of visual language.

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