



A Grand Eye for Glory: A Life of Franz Johnston

Roger Burford Mason

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Franz Johnston is the missing man of Canadian painting. The most prolific and financially successful of the original Group of Seven, Johnston's paintings were among the most sought after in Canada in the years between the mid-1920s and his death in 1949. They appear in the collections of dozens of discriminating private collectors, and in institutions such as the National Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the McMichael Canadian Collection, and the Canadian War Museum. As well, his work once hung, in thousands of well-loved reproductions, on the walls of ordinary people's homes the length and breadth of the country. And yet, for all his distinguished success, Johnston is no more than a footnote in the many histories of the Group of Seven, and is rarely mentioned in the context of the general development of art in Canada in the twentieth century.

Johnston was born and raised in Toronto, worked with J.E.H. MacDonald, Fred Varley, Arthur Lismer, and Franklin Carmichael at Grip, the famous commercial art studio in Toronto, and served with distinction as an official war artist in the last years of the First World War. He subsequently taught at the art schools in Winnipeg and Toronto (he was the principal of the Winnipeg Art School and Gallery for four years in the early 1920s) before opening his own art school on the shores of Georgian Bay. When the Group of Seven held its first, seminal exhibition at the Art Museum of Toronto in May 1920, Johnston exhibited and sold more paintings than any of the others.

In this, the first biography of Franz Johnston, the author seeks to provide a guide to the life, work, and times of this unjustly neglected, but influential figure in Canadian art and culture. Beautifully illustrated with sixteen four-colour reproductions of Johnston's best paintings, and rare black-and-white photographs from a family collection and other sources.

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