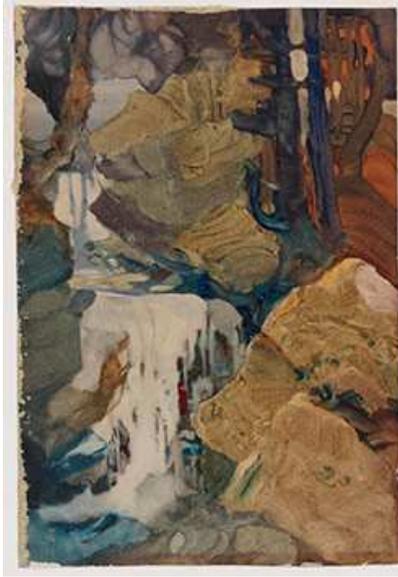


Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings



Emily Carr
Kitwancool, 1928
watercolour, graphite on paper
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery



Charles John Collings
Falls in Creek off the Shuswap
watercolour on paper
Promised gift of Uno Langmann

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE Fall 2012

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

Emily Carr and Charles John Collings both used watercolour to interpret their surroundings in British Columbia during the first half of the twentieth century. However, their art-making practices and approaches to their work couldn't have been more different. *Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings* presents an in-depth look at their work, which includes many of Carr's explorations of First Nations culture and Collings' studies from his native England. The main focus of the watercolours in this exhibition is the rugged landscape of the province that inspired both artists.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings*, and provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings* has three main goals:

- to explore the watercolour techniques and practices of Emily Carr and Charles John Collings,
- to consider the connections in the work to the landscape of British Columbia,
- to examine each artist's individual approach to art in terms of their ideas, materials, techniques and inspiration.

THE EXHIBITION: *Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings*

Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings contrasts watercolour paintings by two exceptional artists working in the same period, with the same materials, in the same province—and yet producing strongly differing interpretations of the landscape. More likely than not, they never knew of each other's existence. Carr's vision as a Modernist painter and Collings' technical proficiency as a traditional watercolourist couldn't have been further apart.

Emily Carr created her paintings on site, out in the landscape. She was not interested in the literal recording of details but was intent on capturing her natural surroundings in order to re-create the spirit of the place, documenting the shapes of the trees, the wind in the sky, the patterns of the landscape. Hers were interpretations of a specific place, and the connections to the physical site are real and recognizable. Her aim was the same whether she was attempting to document First Nations villages and Totem Poles or to capture the blustery weather deep in the forests of British Columbia.

Conversely, Collings' paintings were fictionalized compositions created in his studio, stitched together from explorations of his natural surroundings. Rather than attempts to depict a specific location, his landscapes were expressions of his imagination. Back in urban industrial England, these romanticized interpretations of British Columbia's wilderness were accepted unquestioningly as literal representations of the new world.

Ironically, neither artist was well regarded in British Columbia. Carr's 1913 exhibition in Vancouver was so poorly received that she retreated from her art for the next ten years. Collings, unknown locally, was heralded as Turner's successor in England. But today it is Carr who is receiving international attention while Collings has slipped into relative obscurity.

Their working processes were very different. At certain times in her career Carr's watercolours were created as final works, made in direct response to the realities of the outdoor environment in which she was working. But for much of her career, her watercolours were conceived as sketches intended to be taken to her studio and used as studies. The composition of the final paintings—mostly in oil—would be considerably manipulated and changed from the observations recorded in the original watercolours.

Collings never painted out in the wilderness he loved. He was a studio artist, an expert and accomplished technician, a career watercolourist. This was always his medium of choice and his adeptness and skill have been much written about and admired.

Works in the exhibition demonstrate their distinct styles, outlook and skills. Carr's *Pines in May*, 1930, and *Wood Interior*, 1909, are clear examples of her Modernist painting style and direct response to the particularity of place. Collings' *A Deserted Farmstead*, 1924, and *Dawn at Hope, B.C.*, undated, clearly illustrate his imaginative interpretation of the province's landscape portrayed in the crispness and clarity of technique for which he is known.

Over the last forty years, the Vancouver collector and gallery owner Uno Langmann has assembled a major collection of work by Charles John Collings. *Hope at Dawn: Watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings* is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Ian Thom, Senior Curator, historical.

ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

Emily Carr (1871–1945)

One of the most important British Columbia artists of her generation, Emily Carr is best known for her work documenting the Totem Poles of First Nations peoples of the province of British Columbia and her forest landscapes.

Carr began taking art lessons as a child and continued her studies in San Francisco and England, where she most likely first began sketching outdoors. She returned to Canada with solid—if conservative—technical skills. In 1911 she went to France to study drawing and painting, and returned to Canada this time with a completely new approach to painting and to using watercolour paints. She worked directly from her subject matter and used vibrant Fauvist colours, broken brushstrokes and minimal detail, and her work achieved a new-found immediacy and freshness.

In the summer of 1912, Carr travelled north to visit First Nations villages on the Skeena River and Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) and in the fall she produced the first of her major canvases of First Nations subject matter, using her recently acquired Modernist painting skills. Carr exhibited these works in Vancouver in early 1913 and offered them for sale to the provincial government. The works were rejected on the grounds that they were not “documentary” enough; they were too abstract. Unable to support herself through her art, she returned to Victoria to turn her attention to alternative ways of making a living. Over the next decade, Carr produced very little painting; she ran a boarding house, raised sheepdogs, made pottery and gave art lessons.

In 1927, Carr’s work was included in the exhibition *West Coast Art: Native and Modern* at the National Gallery in Ottawa. This was her introduction to other artists, particularly members of the Group of Seven, who recognized the quality and originality of her work. In the 1930s, Carr began devoting most of her attention to landscape, particularly the forest, as her subject matter. Greatly influenced by her exchange of letters with Lawren Harris, Carr sought to capture a sense of the spiritual presence that she experienced in nature. Her work became increasingly abstract as she experimented with shape, form, colour and movement.

In the late 1930s, as her health worsened, Carr began to focus more energy on writing, producing an important series of books. One of these, *Klee Wyck*—stories based on her experiences with First Nations people—won the Governor General's Award for Literature in 1941. She died in 1945 in Victoria at the age of seventy-four, recognized as an artist and writer of major importance.

Charles John Collings (1848–1931)

Born in Devonshire, England, Charles John Collings trained as a lawyer and worked mostly in the insurance industry for twenty years. Always interested in painting, he finally decided to pursue a full-time career as an artist. Although he sought out watercolour painting lessons—within a few short months causing his teacher to exclaim that Collings had learned all he could teach him—he was largely self-taught. He began exhibiting his watercolours in London galleries in the early 1900s, and his work was compared to that of William Turner.

Already in his sixties, Collings decided in 1910 to immigrate to Canada. With his wife and two adult sons, he found his way to British Columbia and soon settled on the remote shores of Shuswap Lake. With the help of his sons, he built a grand Tudor house in the wilderness, a site that could only be reached by water. While his sons took care of most of the requirements for living in an isolated and often inaccessible environment, Collings continued painting, selling his work through the Carroll Gallery in London. The dealer Luscombe Carroll was committed enough to Collings and his work to

make the arduous trip to visit him in this remote area of western Canada. Collings pretty much kept to himself and rarely interacted with local artists or exhibited his work in Canada.

He loved to hike in the Rockies, most often with the English Alpine Club, and to return to his studio to create paintings of the majestic mountains. These were exhibited in the first major exhibition of his Canadian work, in London in 1912. Titled *The Canadian Rockies*, the show received both popular and critical acclaim, earning him the nickname Recluse of the Rockies. The *Times of London* reported the work to be “inspired art” and “exquisite, among the most remarkable achievements since the days of Turner, little lyrics in paint, veritable poems in colour, of rare quality and beauty, hardly equalled by any other living painter.”

Described as “a colourist of the first rank,” Collings was hailed as an innovator in the field of watercolour, having developed a unique technique that involved soaking the paper for days and then applying the pigments directly to the wet surface, allowing the colours to flow and bleed into the paper. Collings would then lift off unwanted pigment floating on the surface of the saturated paper, unlike the more common practice of applying layers or washes of colour and defined brushstrokes to build forms. Using his technique, Collings created colours that are alternately soft and diffused, crisp and glowingly intense.

Collings died in 1931, and his wife died five years later. His sons, who never married, continued to live in the Shuswap house, which they later opened to the public for historical tours.

Collings’ watercolours can be found in galleries and museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: The Artists (all grades)

Objective: Students explore the lives of Emily Carr and Charles John Collings: their art practices, influences and watercolour processes.

Background:

Emily Carr and Charles John Collings stand out among those who have explored British Columbia's landscape. They worked during the same time period, albeit in very different ways. While they both loved to be out in the wilderness, Carr liked to work directly from nature as it presented itself in front of her, while Collings almost always created his landscapes in his studio, from ideas and images that he put together working from memory and imagination. Although they never met, and we can only speculate as to whether they actually heard of one another, together they provide an interesting historical perspective of our province.

Materials:

- the Internet; some useful websites:
<http://www.emilycarr.ca/>
<http://bcheritage.ca/emilycarrhomework/gallery/gallvag/vagmain.htm>
http://shuswapwatershed.ca/pdf/Collings-Famous_Artist.pdf
http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/k_maltwood/history/cjcollings.html
- Artist Information Sheet and Student Worksheet (following pages)
- writing materials, coloured pencils

Process:

1. Divide the class in half. Give half the class some points of information on Carr, the other half information on Collings (Artist Information Sheet, next page).
 - Fewer points can be chosen for younger students, appropriate to their level and understanding
2. Have the students work in pairs and read the information with their partners.
3. Clarify any terms students do not understand; e.g., First Nations, Fauvism (see Vocabulary, page 13).
4. Using the internet, have students expand their information, look at examples of their artist's work and make a copy of one work containing a scene from nature.
5. Have each pair work with a pair who have studied the other artist, and have them trade information, each filling in the other half of their Student Worksheet (page 9) as the other pair gives information. As one set of students describes an artwork, have the others use coloured pencils to sketch the image using only verbal descriptions; i.e., not looking at the original picture.
6. Have the pairs switch roles.

Alternatively, this can be done as a class, having some students present their information to the whole class and the others complete the Worksheet.

Conclusion:

- Ask students to comment on similarities and differences of the artists and their art.
- Did the artists have practices, attributes or perspectives that might be described as particularly British Columbian? Explain.
- Should artists be showing real places, or is it reasonable for artists to use their imaginations to show specific locations? Explain.

Artist Information Sheet

Emily Carr

<http://bcheritage.ca/emilycarrhomework/gallery/gallvag/vagmain.htm>

<http://www.emilycarr.ca/>

- Born and died in Victoria
- Lived most of her life alone, had lots of animals
- Was thought of as unusual, different from other women in Victoria
- Studied art in San Francisco, England and France
- Travelled through British Columbia visiting First Nations villages and forests
- Found it hard to make a living, gave up art for a long time
- Only later was recognized as an important British Columbian artist
- Influenced by Fauvism, abstraction and Lawren Harris and the Group of Seven
- Modernist painter who experimented with colour, form, shapes and visible brushstrokes
- Preferred to sketch her landscapes outdoors; often made final works in her studio
- Wrote many books toward the end of her life, which were well received
- Best known for painting the forests of British Columbia and First Nations villages
- Only sometimes used watercolour, most often painted in oil

John Collings

<http://www.sharecom.ca/phillips/wetpaint18.html>

http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/k_maltwood/history/cjcollings.html

- Born in England, died in British Columbia
- Trained as a lawyer, worked for twenty years before becoming a full-time artist
- Was mostly self-taught, did have some lessons
- Moved to British Columbia in his sixties, with his wife and two sons
- Built a big English house on Shuswap Lake that could only be reached by boat
- Painted while his sons worked to support the family
- Always sold his paintings in London, never mixed with local artists
- Loved hiking and being out in the mountains, but always painted in his studio
- Nicknamed Recluse of the Rockies
- Painted from his imagination, not real recognizable places
- Was known for his watercolours, and for new watercolour techniques
- His work was compared to paintings by William Turner
- After Collings and his wife died, their sons lived in the house and gave historical tours

Student Worksheet

| | Emily Carr | Charles John Collins |
|--------------------------------|------------|----------------------|
| Personal information | | |
| Travels & influences | | |
| Process and techniques | | |
| Description of artworks | | |
| Annotated sketch of an artwork | | |

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Using Watercolour (all grades)

Objective: Students learn and use some watercolour techniques, and then investigate techniques used by Collings and Carr in some of their watercolour paintings

Discussion:

- Carr and Collings used watercolour for very different purposes. Carr created immediate responses to her subjects, most often creating her watercolours out in the landscape. She approached her work as a Modernist, using bright colours, visible brushstrokes and minimal detail. Her work became increasingly abstract.
- Collings was a traditional watercolourist who worked exclusively in his studio. He was known for his technical skills and detailed work. Described as an innovator, he developed a technique that involved soaking his paper and then applying colour directly to the wet paper. Colours would bleed into the surrounding area, creating unusual effects.

Materials:

- Watercolour paper – 2 small sheets per student (watercolour paper varies enormously in price and quality; test it before working with students)
- Watercolour paints, paintbrushes, containers of water and paper towel
- Hair dryers (optional)
- The internet, for watercolour images by the two artists:
<http://bcheritage.ca/emilycarrhomework/gallery/gallvag/vagmain.htm>
http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/k_maltwood/history/cjcollings.html

Process:

1. Distribute handout on next page: Basic Watercolour Painting Techniques. Have students read out the instructions to you while you demonstrate each technique.
2. Give each student a small sheet of watercolour paper, paint, paintbrush and a container of water. Students experiment with the different techniques.
3. Hair dryers are useful to speed up the drying process. If not used, the activity can be extended over a few days to allow the paper to air-dry between washes.
4. Discuss what students discovered through their experimentation.
5. On a fresh sheet of paper, have students make a painting that includes
 - at least three different watercolour techniques,
 - at least three different landscape elements; e.g., tree, mountain, river.
6. Once the paintings are dry, display and discuss. Ask students to identify which techniques were used and to explain why they chose those particular techniques.
7. Collect and display some images of watercolours by Emily Carr and Charles John Collings. These are easily available on the internet (see above).
8. Based on observation, ask students to identify what techniques the artists might have used to create certain effects in different areas of the paintings.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- What was it like using watercolour techniques? Fun? Hard? Frustrating? Explain.
- Is watercolour suited to a particular subject? Landscape? Portrait? Why?
- If you could use the materials again, what would you do differently? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask Carr or Collings about their techniques, processes and work in general?

Basic Watercolour Painting Techniques

Flat Wash Technique

- Mix enough of the colour you are going to use for the entire wash.
- Wet the surface of the paper and place it on a slight slope.
- Apply watercolour in slightly overlapping horizontal bands, from top to bottom.
- Leave to dry; don't try to work back into the wash once it is dry or drying.
- For a variation called the graded wash: dilute the paint by adding a little water for each horizontal stroke, resulting in a wash that fades out gradually and evenly.
- Once dry, the wash can be used as a background to paint over.

Wet in Wet

- Paint is applied onto wet paper.
- The colour will bleed or spread, resulting in soft undefined shapes or blurry marks.
- This a good technique to paint distant objects such as trees or mountains.

Dropping in Color

- Paint is applied onto a wet part of the painting.
- The colour blends or bleeds into the colour underneath.
- The results are unpredictable and fun to experiment with.

Dry Brush

- Use a damp—not wet—brush to apply colour on completely dry paper.
- The marks produced by the brush are crisp and hard-edged.
- This is a good technique to create foreground interest and detail.

Lifting Off

- Used to remove watercolour from a certain area of the painting.
- Wet the area to be removed using a brush and clean water.
- Blot the pigment away with a tissue or sponge.
- If the colour doesn't lift, the process can be repeated.
- Shapes can be created by using strips of paper to mask areas already coloured.
- Some colours stain the paper and are difficult to remove.

Glazing

- Paint a thin, transparent colour wash over a previous wash, which must be dry.
- Use a soft brush and don't apply much pressure.
- New and interesting colours will appear.
- This can be repeated, using different colours after the undercoat is dry.

Some useful tips:

- Watercolour looks stronger and darker when wet, and lighter and paler when dry.
- Watercolour paint is water soluble. This means you can re-wet the dried paint with a wet brush and it will "turn" back into paint, allowing you to make some changes.
- Watercolour paint is transparent. This means that you can see through the layers of colour, making it difficult to cover mistakes. Accept this and work with it!
- The surface of the paper is easily damaged; be careful not to rub too hard.

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Portraits of a Place (all ages)

Objective: Students consider the different working processes used by Carr and Collings and create images of the school grounds based on these alternative ways of working.

Discussion:

- Collings loved the outdoors, choosing to live in the isolation of the Shuswap in British Columbia. He went on long hikes and explored the wilderness, earning himself the nickname Recluse of the Rockies. But he chose not to create his art directly out of the natural landscape. He created reconstructed images in his studio, using his imagination to piece together the parts of the landscape that were important or memorable to him.
- A critic wrote of Collings: *“It is as if the painter did not see fact in a landscape but fiction and romance.”*
- Carr chose to work outdoors, in nature, painting directly what she saw. Out in the landscape she studied the colours and textures of the trees, foliage, lakes and sky, and observed the way light, wind and weather affected their subjects, and she tried to record these directly in her work.
- Emily Carr wrote the following passage in her book *Growing Pains*:
“Outdoor study was as different from studio study as eating is from drinking. Indoors we munched and chewed our subjects. Fingertips roamed objects feeling for bumps and depressions. We tested textures, observed contours. Sketching outdoors was a fluid process, half looking, half dreaming, awaiting invitation from the spirit of the subject to ‘come, meet me half way.’ Outdoor sketching was as much longing as labour. Atmosphere, space cannot be touched, bullied like the vegetables of still life or like the plaster casts. These space things asked to be felt not with fingertips but with one’s whole self.”

Materials:

- sketchpads and coloured pencils

Process:

1. On the board, list things in the schoolyard. What are the important things or places for students? Where are they when they are looking at these things? At the gate, sitting under a tree, on the swing, out by the fence, on the steps, etc.
2. Sitting at their desks, have students use coloured pencils to sketch the area from memory. They can leave out or change parts, including the things that are most interesting or important to them, creating an interpretation of the space.
3. Once their drawings are complete, take the class outside, and ask each student to go to the place they imagined themselves in when they made their drawing.
4. Using coloured pencils, have students sketch exactly what they see, keeping all the elements, recording colours and objects as accurately as they can.
5. Back in the classroom, display their two images alongside one another.
6. Compare and contrast.

Conclusion: Discuss:

- Which drawing was most satisfying or challenging to make? Why?
- Arrange the drawings in two sections—those made inside and those made outdoors. Which group of drawings do they find more interesting? Why?

VOCABULARY

abstract: a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

Fauvism: A name (meaning “wild beasts”) for an art movement that originated in France at the end of the nineteenth century. Fauvists were concerned with creating fresh and spontaneous images, and used brilliant colours in an arbitrary and decorative way.

First Nations: Aboriginal cultures of Canada.

landscape: a work of art in which the subject is a view of the exterior physical world. Traditionally, landscapes have been paintings or drawings depicting natural scenes and have often been concerned with light, space and setting.

Modern: an approach to art that embraced new ideas ranging from science to political thought. The Modernists rejected the restrictions of past art traditions and stressed innovation over all other criteria.

RESOURCES

Books:

- Appeloff, Marian. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Watercolor*, New York: Watson-Guptill, 1992.
- Bennett, Bryan. *Discovering Canadian Art: Learning the Language*. Toronto: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1984.
- Harrison, Hazel. *Watercolour School*. New York: Reader's Digest, 1993.
- Hill, Charles C., Johanne Lamoureux, Ian M. Thom, et al. *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/National Gallery of Canada/Vancouver Art Gallery, 2006.
- Laurence, Robin. *Beloved Land: The World of Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.
- Murray, Joan. *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999.
- Rhodes, Richard. *A First Book of Canadian Art*. Toronto: Owl Books, 2001.
- Shadbolt, Doris. *Emily Carr*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990.
- Shadbolt, Doris, ed. *The Emily Carr Omnibus*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993. Includes *Klee Wyck*, *The Book of Small*, *The House of All Sorts*, *Growing Pains*, *Pause*, *The Heart of a Peacock* and *Hundreds and Thousands*.
- Thom, Ian. *Emily Carr: Drawing the Forest*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002.

Online:

www.artcyclopedia.com

Online art encyclopedia, listing international artists and museums and galleries with collections of their work. Includes a large selection of reproductions of artworks.

www.wikipedia.com

Online dictionary and encyclopedia with some background and biographical information on artists.

<http://www.sharecom.ca/phillips/wetpaint18.html>

http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/k_maltwood/history/cjcollings.html

<http://bcheritage.ca/emilycarrhomework/gallery/gallmain.htm>

<http://bcheritage.ca/emilycarrhomework/gallery/gallvag/vagmain.htm>

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