

# **Cassatt–McNicoll: Impressionists Between Worlds**

## **Introductory Text**

This exhibition brings together the work of American Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) and Canadian Helen McNicoll (1879–1915), whose art challenged the conventions of their time. They each engaged with Impressionism, a new artistic movement that drew from contemporary life for its subject matter. As artists who pursued training and professional careers in Europe, they both succeeded in popularizing Impressionism across North America. For Cassatt and McNicoll, their work reinforced the contributions of professional working women at the turn of the twentieth century.

As artists navigating lives on both sides of the Atlantic, and as women pushing to gain greater recognition within the male-dominated art world, they broke down barriers to professional success. While Cassatt and McNicoll never met, what they most importantly share in common is their status as Impressionists between worlds.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **On a Balcony**

1878–1879

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Albert J. Beveridge in memory of her aunt, Delia Spencer Field

1938.18

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **In the Tent**

1913–1914

oil on canvas

Private collection, Toronto

Cassatt's figure reads a newspaper, positioning her as a modern woman in tune with the contemporary world beyond her balcony. McNicoll's model, who was a fellow artist, looks at an art book and is engaged in the process of making art. Cassatt and McNicoll represented women in a way they hadn't often been shown before, with complex thoughts and full lives. The artists also showcased their talent as painters, seen here in the white dresses painted with an array of colours that capture the effects of sunlight. Both figures are situated outdoors but are shielded from view by a lush garden or fabric tent, situating them in-between public and private worlds.

### **Transatlantic Travel**

Before the invention of air travel, Cassatt and McNicoll crossed the Atlantic Ocean by steamship. They were able to do so thanks to the growing reliability, frequency, and comfort of first-class

travel on modern ocean liners—a luxury available only to a privileged few.

The availability of transatlantic travel made Cassatt and McNicoll's careers possible. The training they received in European art academies as well as the rich collections of historical European art that they visited across the continent influenced their respective practices immensely. The increased speed of travel across the Atlantic allowed them to maintain important ties with North America. As a result, they became essential in bringing Impressionism to their countries of birth.

## **Canadian Pacific Railway Company**

### ***Empress of Ireland at Sea***

1906–1914

vintage postcard

Courtesy of Caroline Shields

## **Canadian Pacific Railway Company**

### ***Empresses of the Atlantic***

March 1916

printed pamphlet

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-232-11-2

## **Canadian Pacific Royal Mail Steamship Lines**

### **A Package of Postcards and a “Wireless.” A Bride’s Story**

1907

printed booklet

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-226-4-1

## **Canadian Pacific Steamships**

### **The “Empresses” of the Atlantic**

around 1906

printed pamphlet

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-232-11-3

**Canadian Pacific Steamships, Atlantic Service**

**Canadian Pacific Atlantic Steamship Service**

1910

printed pamphlet

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace  
B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-230-17-1

**Canadian Pacific Steamships, Atlantic Service**

**The St. Lawrence Route to Europe, summer season**

1907

printed pamphlet

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace  
B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-232-1-4

**Canadian Pacific Steamships, Atlantic Service**

**Saloon passenger list, *Empress of Britain's* sailing  
from Liverpool to Quebec**

July 28, 1911

printed passenger list

Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections,

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Wallace  
B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection

CC-TX-236-1-8

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) launched its own line of transatlantic passenger service in 1903. In 1906, the CPR launched their most luxurious steamships to date, the *Empress of Britain* and *Empress of Ireland*. The associated promotional materials highlighted their fast passage and the accommodations and amusements that were tailored to wealthy passengers. This pamphlet lists all passengers in the Saloon class travelling from Liverpool to Quebec on the *Empress of Britain* in July 1911. Among them were McNicoll's mother, father, and sister, who were returning to Montreal after attending to CPR business and visiting family, including the artist, in England.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Seated Woman**

around 1910

from *Smith Sketchbook*

graphite on artist's paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9445

As the daughter of the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR) vice-president, McNicoll had easy access to transatlantic passage and travelled almost exclusively on their line. Her sketchbooks are full of drawings from when she was in transit, including those of fellow passengers on the boat deck and figures bundled up against the Atlantic wind.

McNicoll drew this scene of a woman sitting at a lamp-topped writing desk in front of a piano during a transatlantic crossing. The photographs in the nearby CPR documents reveal that she chose the music room of one of the *Empress of the Atlantic* ships as the setting for this introspective image.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **The Farmyard**

around 1908

oil on canvas

Collection of the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick, Saint John Art Club Collection, 1995

1995.26.26

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Children Playing on the Beach**

1884

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

1970.17.19

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Young Girl at a Window**

around 1883–1884

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection  
(Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

2014.79.9

This young woman's hat and gloves suggest she is about to leave for, or has just returned from, an outing, yet the dog atop her lap conveys stillness rather than a woman on the move. The model for this painting was the cousin of Cassatt's housekeeper, whom the artist dressed in fashionable Parisian clothes and posed with her own dog.

Cassatt painted this staged scene in her apartment, which was also her studio. A Paris boulevard stretches into the distance behind the young woman, yet the railing of the balcony abruptly separates her from the outside world. Instead of engaging with the cityscape, her parted lips and downcast eyes suggest she may be lost in her own thoughts, suspended between indoor and outdoor, private and public.



## **Posing Models, Making Art**

While Cassatt's and McNicoll's paintings may appear to casually capture scenes from their daily lives, they are in fact highly staged and contrived—from the composition of the work to the models they hired. These models were often housekeepers, seamstresses, residents of villages where the artists lived or travelled, and sometimes family members or friends.

Cassatt and McNicoll dressed their models in clothing of the artists' choosing. Cassatt frequently styled working-class women or children in the fashionable clothing of her own upper class so that the painting would appear like a portrait. McNicoll would hire, for example, the daughters of fishmongers whom she would dress and pose at work and play. For each artist, this process was more about the art of painting than the model and her life. Through the deliberate construction of their compositions, Cassatt and McNicoll positioned themselves as professional artists.

## **Overcoming Challenges**

At the end of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, there were many challenges for a woman seeking a career as an artist. Most North American art academies excluded women from studying the nude figure, which was considered a key aspect of artistic education. As a result, many women travelled abroad to find more liberal art schools. Even in Paris, major institutions like the École des Beaux-Arts only began admitting women in 1897.

Societal expectations prevented wealthy white women like Cassatt and McNicoll from appearing alone in cafes or on city streets, where male Impressionist artists painted frequently.

Women artists had to be all the more creative in selecting their subjects.

As professional artists engaged with the social and political environments of their time, Cassatt and McNicoll forged ahead despite various obstacles. Their artworks highlight the many roles of women at work, from educators and caregivers to seamstresses and field workers—and, of course, artists.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Francoise in Green, Sewing**

1908–1909

oil on canvas

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of the Ida Belle Young Art Acquisition Fund

2009.0006

Cassatt hired this young girl, Francoise, as a model from the rural village near her home at Château Beaufresne, located north of Paris. The artist dressed her in fashionable Parisian clothes and posed her in a sophisticated interior, completely absorbed in her task of needle-threading. Cassatt's interest was not in making a portrait; rather, she delights in showing the colour and texture of the model's very full skirt and blouse. The quick strokes made with a loaded brush create a believable pattern. The shades of green repeated in the drapery behind her and the lacy shawl that catches the light form a harmonious and balanced composition. Although this picture expertly captures the inward-looking child, it is really about Cassatt's craft as an artist.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Cherry Time**

around 1912

oil on canvas

McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Gift of Hubert B. Sceats

1995.30.3

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **The Bath**

1890–1891

drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint in colour on laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M.

Drummond, Montreal, 1987

29873

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Under the Shadow of the Tent**

1913

oil on canvas

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David  
McNicoll

1915.122

The women shown here are making art. McNicoll depicts one woman holding a paint box and another looking at an art book that is represented with only a few brushstrokes. By painting this scene, McNicoll includes herself as part of a trio of artist friends. Although sitting outside, the artists are shielded by a large tent, which functions as a barrier between the private act of making art and the public space of the beach. Filtered sunlight is cast across the canvas onto the white dress of the crouching woman, showcasing McNicoll's exploration of light and shadow in the Impressionist style.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **The Fitting**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M. Drummond, Montreal, 1987

29877

This work, from Cassatt's "Set of Ten" coloured prints, focuses on a woman being fitted with a fashionable day dress, with her figure repeated in the full-length mirror behind her. She looks over her shoulder at a second figure, the seamstress, crouched at her feet. Cassatt has constructed a dynamic composition by cropping the seamstress's dress, positioning the baseboard as a strong diagonal, and combining four different patterns.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Picking Berries**

1910

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Interior**

around 1913

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Purchase, 1976

75/100

In comparison to Cassatt's *Woman Bathing* on view nearby, McNicoll has removed the female figure from her composition and leaves the viewer to explore what remains. There are visible signs that someone has just left this bedroom: a robe, tossed on the chair, which may tip over at any moment, and a row of footprints on the carpet. The brilliant shaft of sunlight that streaks across the carpet and up the dresser will move with the sun. Through these fleeting details, McNicoll has made the passage of time the subject of this painting.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Woman Bathing**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M. Drummond, Montreal, 1987

29878

### **Women at Work**

At the centre of each room is a single painting by one artist, positioned in a cross-gallery dialogue with several works by the other artist. Cassatt and McNicoll shared an interest in representing women at work, which we see here as both agricultural labour and the work of caregiving. While apple gathering and berry picking may be considered leisure activities for some today, the red cheeks and aprons in McNicoll's scenes paint a picture of work. They stand in contrast to Cassatt's fashionably dressed women at the centre, whose act of plucking fruit symbolizes the passage of knowledge. McNicoll's monumental caregiver in the next gallery is deeply absorbed in her own reading, whereas Cassatt's surrounding paintings highlight the sense of touch and the physicality of caregiving.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **The Little Worker**

around 1910

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Purchase, 1983

83/238

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Buttercups**

around 1910

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Sylva Gelber,  
Ottawa, 2005

41709

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Mother and Child Picking Berries**

around 1911

oil on canvas

Private collection, Connecticut

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **The Gleaner**

around 1908

oil on canvas

Samuel & Esther Sarick

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **The Apple Gatherer**

around 1911

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Gift of G.C. Mutch, Esq., in memory of his mother, Annie Elizabeth Mutch, 1957

57.87.O

Together with the rosy cheeks of this working woman, the sunlight that filters through the leaves captures the sensation of a fleeting moment under a scorching autumnal sun. The tree is nearly all picked and the basket filled with apples. McNicoll shows her model as a modest woman with a simple apron, yet she also stands in a position that towers over the viewer, presenting a feeling of grandeur. Cassatt and McNicoll each featured models from the rural working class in the compositions featured in this room. Whereas Cassatt's figures are dressed in fashionable clothing, McNicoll emphasizes everyday realities.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Picking Fruit**



around 1910

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

Two women harvest fruit from a carefully cultivated tree, which its caretakers have pruned to grow flat against the wall of the building and keep covered in protective netting. This glimpse of nature amid tightly packed homes, and the women diligently at work attending to it, must have caught McNicoll's eye while walking along a cobblestone street during her travels around Europe. Her delicately balanced composition is as carefully crafted as the tree it features.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Young Women Picking Fruit**

1891

oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Patrons Art Fund

22.8

A woman plucks fruit from a tree and passes it to another, which for Cassatt symbolized the sharing of knowledge between women. Cassatt highlights the connection between the two figures through the S-shaped line that joins their arms and the fruit. She dressed her models in upper-middle class fashions, carefully representing the folds of the pink garment and the floral patterns of the blue dress. The monumentality of these statue-like figures

conveys the timelessness of this story in which women support each other.

This painting was previously lent to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the AGO) on the occasion of the *Inaugural Exhibition* held here in 1926, where McNicoll's work was also celebrated.

## **Crossings: Cassatt in Canada**

Cassatt developed an international reputation and a public presence across North America. Although she never travelled to Canada, she was called “the well-known American artist” in the Montreal press. This achievement came from Cassatt's fierce commitment to succeeding as a professional artist. For her, this meant making a living from the sale of her work and exhibiting widely, including within Canada.

Cassatt was a role model for the next generation of aspiring North American women artists—McNicoll among them—who saw her work both abroad and at home. *The Child's Caress*, on view nearby, was the first painting by Cassatt to be exhibited in Canada. While Canadian museums acquired and exhibited Cassatt's works during her lifetime and after her death, no Canadian institution has owned a Cassatt painting to date.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **The Child's Caress**

around 1891

oil on canvas

Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift in memory of  
Wilhelmina Tenney by a group of her friends, 1953

1845.1

The decorative screen of fruit trees in the background and the tender touch between woman and child continues Cassatt's theme of passing knowledge between generations. This canvas was included in a 1915 exhibition in support of women's suffrage (the right to vote) that Cassatt helped to organize.

*The Child's Caress* was originally in the private collection of Sir William Van Horne, a great patron of the arts and president of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It is likely that McNicoll saw this painting when it was exhibited at the Art Association of Montreal in 1895 and at the Van Horne residence in Montreal. Van Horne was a McNicoll family friend and purchased some of the artist's canvases, suggesting that this Cassatt could have hung near works by McNicoll during both artists' lifetimes.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Maternal Caress**

around 1896

oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Aaron E. Carpenter, 1970

1970-75-2

At the centre of this painting, gripping hands convey a charged interconnection between woman and child, heightened by the oblique viewing angle. While the painting's title suggests an

affectionate embrace, the caretaker's firm grasp on the child's arm may suggest a struggle. Cassatt likely knew that sweet titles were more marketable.

In contrast to the physical gap that separates McNicoll's woman and child in this gallery, Cassatt's works frequently feature highly tactile interactions that call attention to the demanding labour of childcare. Cassatt subtly pushed against societal expectations of the period that a woman paint perfectly content mothers, allowing her viewers to find their own experiences reflected in her art.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Gathering Fruit**

around 1893

drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint in colour on blue laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Purchased 1915

1138

### **Cassatt's *Modern Woman* Mural**

Cassatt was commissioned to paint a mural titled *Modern Woman* for the Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She worked on the huge mural in her garden in France before it was shipped across the Atlantic to her home country. The work showed women picking fruit and handing it to girls. This was a reference to Eve in the Garden of Eden, the biblical story of the first woman whose sin of plucking fruit from

the Tree of Knowledge brought shame to humankind. Here, Cassatt reclaims Eve by celebrating the harvesting of knowledge, symbolized by fruit, which women pass between generations. Although the mural has been lost, Cassatt created a number of paintings and prints addressing the same theme, many of which are displayed here.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Child Picking a Fruit**

1893

oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Gift of Ivor and Anne Massey

75.18

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Family Group Reading**

1898

oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Watson Webb, 1942

1942-102-1

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Maternal Caress**

1890–1891

drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint in colour on laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M.  
Drummond, Montreal, 1987

29880

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Mother's Kiss**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M.  
Drummond, Montreal, 1987

29879

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Breakfast in Bed**

1897

oil on canvas

The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, Gift  
of the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation

83.8.6

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **In the Shadow of the Tree**

around 1914

oil on canvas

Collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec,  
Purchase

1951.140

This is a rare instance in which McNicoll pairs a woman and a child in a distinct caregiving relationship. However, the woman does not touch the child, only the carriage, possibly rocking it to lull the child back to sleep. The physical gap is a symbolic one as well: McNicoll deliberately resisted the expectation that women artists would paint sentimental pictures of tender mothers and children. Instead, the figure is absorbed in reading—a multitasking caregiver doing her own mental work.

The title, *In the Shadow of the Tree*, highlights that McNicoll's passion lies in conveying light, texture, and atmosphere—seen, for example, in the dappled sunlight and swaying fringe of the child's blanket.

## **Professional Artists**

Professional status was central to Cassatt's and McNicoll's personal definitions of success. As women fighting to gain access

to a male-dominated field—which was the case for women in most professions during the period—this was a bold ambition. In an era when women were expected to marry then raise children, both artists defied these expectations.

The paintings in this room were created at pivotal moments in each artist’s career. Cassatt painted these works at the height of her participation in the Impressionist exhibitions in Paris, which were crucial in helping to develop her network and further her career. McNicoll created these canvases at the same time that she was elected to important artist societies in England and Canada, increasing acclaim for her work.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **The Cup of Tea**

around 1880–1881

oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, From the Collection of James Stillman, Gift of Dr. Ernest G. Stillman, 1922

22.16.17

In *The Cup of Tea*, Cassatt poses her sister Lydia participating in the upper-class Parisian ritual of afternoon tea. The gold-rimmed cup, silver spoon, and her hat and gloves suggest she is a guest and that the occasion is formal. This painting was shown in the sixth Impressionist exhibition (in 1881). The chair’s fabric alternates between matte and shiny bands, the latter reflecting her pink dress, itself captured in vigorous brushwork. Cassatt was



very close with Lydia, whom she painted on many occasions, and who sadly died the following year at the age of 45.

## **MARY CASSATT**

### **Portrait of Madame J (Young Woman in Black)**

1883

oil on canvas

### **Collection of the Maryland State Archives**

MSA SC 4680-10-0010

This sophisticated female figure sits in front of an asymmetrically placed fan. The fan and golden chair rail in the background bisecting her head are unsettling elements that add to the mystery of the unidentified subject. Cassatt skilfully conveys the transparency of the veil over Madame J's face, while the plumes on her black hat seem to meld with the painted fan over her head. Cassatt kept this fan, which was painted by her fellow Impressionist Edgar Degas, in her personal collection for many years.

## **From Chintz to Crinoline**

As McNicoll's professional recognition grew, her subject matter shifted from landscapes to monumental portraits of women. These three interiors are among the most ambitious works of her career, completed just before she died at the age of 35. Two feature a floral-patterned chintz sofa, an Indian fabric brought to England through colonialism, which had become popular in

domestic interiors. The crinoline dress that appears here twice was already 50 years out of style by McNicoll's time and came to symbolize the restrictions placed on women in earlier generations.

These interiors are set in McNicoll's London studio, a space she shared with the artist Dorothea Sharp. Here, the artist's studio is celebrated as a space of female creativity, as the woman in each painting is either engaged in sewing, reading, or her own thoughts. With this series of works, McNicoll declared a bold new direction in her art.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **The Victorian Dress**

1914

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Gift of Sidney Dawes, M.C., 1958

58.87.Q

The Victorian dress that gives this painting its name overwhelms not only the figure but the entire composition. Further, the skirt obscures the subject's position—we assume she is leaning against the arm of the sofa but it is difficult to be certain. McNicoll lavished attention on this dress, working her paint into thick layers that mimic the texture of crinoline. This transforms the garment into something unfamiliar and strange, as if to highlight the prescribing role it played in restricting women's physical movement. Indeed, dispensing with such Victorian dresses became a symbol of the women's suffrage movement.

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**The Victorian Dress**

around 1914

oil on canvas

McCord Stewart Museum, Gift of Fraser Elliott

M976.134

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**The Chintz Sofa**

1913

oil on canvas

Private collection

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**The Brown Hat**

around 1906

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift from the Estate of R. Fraser Elliott,  
2006

2006/88

## **McNicoll's Travels**

From the time she left Montreal for London in 1902, McNicoll's career was marked by extensive travel. Using her London studio as a home base, she visited destinations popular with modern artists from many different countries. McNicoll's early sketchbooks reveal trips across England, while her later paintings capture visits to the villages and coasts of France and as far afield as Venice, Italy. She also returned home to Canada on an almost annual basis, recording an intense snowstorm on one of these occasions. McNicoll had the financial and familial freedom to travel and seek inspiration as she wished, more so than any other Canadian woman artist during this period.

### **HELEN MCNICOLL**

#### **Sunny Days**

1910

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

### **HELEN MCNICOLL**

#### **Fruit Vendor**

1910

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**The Blue Sea**

around 1914

oil on canvas

McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Andrée Rhéaume Fitzhenry  
and Robert Fitzhenry Gift

2019.4.36

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**White Sunshade #2**

around 1912

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of the Estate of Budd Sugarman, 2006

2006/87

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

**The Avenue**

1912

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

**HELEN MCNICOLL**

## **Landscape with Cows**

around 1907

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Mrs. R. Fraser Elliott, 1977

77/7

McNicoll employs a single type of brushstroke throughout this composition while achieving a variety of effects: the thick daubs of greens in the trees convey sunlight reflecting off dense foliage, while the more sparsely applied blues suggest a hazy sky. In this painting and *The Avenue* nearby, McNicoll captures different atmospheric effects. The cool blue sky of *The Avenue* is typical of a Parisian autumn, while the web of branches creates an intricate pattern of light and shadow on the pathway. In both works, a screen of towering trees and a receding road dissolve away in the distance, pulling us into the scene.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Sunny September**

1913

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

In this canvas, McNicoll uses thick layers of paint in a dazzling array of colours to convey the rush of a windswept landscape. The adult woman, with her slightly downcast gaze, modest hairstyle, and simple white dress, looks out at the shoreline, lost

in her own thoughts. The two children are as animated as the long grasses at their feet— one crouches down while the other gazes at the shore. Although their relationship is unclear, all three figures are bound by the gentle September breeze that enters from the left, softly lifting hems and threatening to blow away the straw hat of the young girl.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Ontario Snowstorm**

around 1911

oil on canvas

Collection – Pierre Lassonde

## **Cassatt's "Set of Ten" Prints**

This ambitious series of ten colour prints from 1890 to 1891 pushed the boundaries of printmaking, marking them as some of the most influential prints of the 1800s. Cassatt was thoroughly versed in printmaking at this time, thanks to her work with black-and-white etchings that had been her focus since the late 1870s. Cassatt skilfully combined different printmaking processes, namely drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint. She printed each colour individually, creating interlacing patterns and angles that achieve a flattened effect. These particular versions are rare due to Cassatt's use of hand-applied gold paint in selected places, as metallic paints were new at this time and her use of them was experimental. Cassatt's ability to convey the soft texture of the women's and children's hair demonstrates her expertise

with this medium. All ten prints are on display throughout the exhibition.

## **MARY CASSATT**

**left to right:**

### **Afternoon Tea Party**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour, hand-coloured  
with gold paint on laid paper

29881

### **The Lamp**

1890–1891

drypoint, soft-ground etching, and aquatint in colour on laid paper

29874

### **The Letter**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

29876

### **The Coiffure**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

29882



## **In the Omnibus**

1890–1891

drypoint and aquatint in colour on laid paper

29875

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Guy M. Drummond, Montreal, 1987

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Wood Green and Broadstairs**

1903

from *Gower Sketchbook*

graphite and watercolour on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9441

McNicoll generally devoted each sketchbook to one moment or subject. They served as visual travel diaries, and various captions identifying dates, places, and people allow us to situate the artist at precise moments. In this sketchbook from 1903–1904, we can trace a series of her trips across England, where she visited the coastal towns of Broadstairs and Blackpool as well as the Isle of Wight. In this two-page spread, McNicoll has inscribed “Wood Green 1903”—a suburb of northern London where members of her extended family lived—and “Broadstairs 1903,” which she visited with her sister and cousin in the summer of 1903.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Landscapes and Village Scenes**

around 1905

from *Lanham Sketchbook*

graphite and black pencil on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9442

McNicoll left behind thirteen sketchbooks, now all in the collection of the AGO. Ranging in date from 1897 to approximately 1910, they are usually full of graphite-on-paper drawings, although McNicoll also used charcoal, conté, black pencil, watercolour, or coloured crayon. The sketchbooks range in size from large, loose sheets to compact, hardbound books, and the number of pages can vary from a fragment with six drawings to a volume of over one hundred pages. As shown here, McNicoll's sketchbooks trace her formative studies—both at home in Montreal and during her years in London—and reveal a growing artistic maturity. They are full of imagery that reappears throughout her paintings, such as figure studies and landscapes.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Whatman Sketchbook**

1900

graphite and charcoal on artist's paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9435

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Child on the Stairs**

February 20, 1899

from *Rowney & Co. Sketchbook*

graphite on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9434

This sketchbook includes several portraits of pupils at a school for oral education, which prioritized lip-reading and verbal speech over sign language for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. McNicoll became deaf at the age of two as a result of contracting scarlet fever, and these drawings show that she visited Connecticut's Mystic Oral School many years later. Here, McNicoll has recorded the name of a student she sketched in February 1899, carefully capturing their features and expression. Other pages in this sketchbook contain drawings from McNicoll's studies at the Art Association of Montreal, which she attended from 1898 to 1902.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Graphic Sketchbook**

1902

graphite, black pencil, and charcoal on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9436

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Sketchbook Fragment**

around 1902

graphite and conté on laid paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9439

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Dessin Sketchbook**

around 1902

graphite and charcoal on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9438

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Reeves & Sons Sketchbook**

1897

graphite on wove paper

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of Jane and John McNicoll, 2002

2002/9433

## **Bringing Impressionism to North America**

Cassatt and McNicoll maintained important ties across the Atlantic, contributing to the spread of Impressionism in North America. Both artists sent their paintings overseas, where they appeared in exhibitions and were purchased by museums and private collectors. As a result, their works were among the very first Impressionist canvases to be seen in the United States and Canada.

Cassatt was a close friend of and art advisor to the major American collector Louisa Havemeyer, whose collection of Impressionist art now forms the core of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's holdings. Cassatt advised many influential art collectors who later donated to American museums. Her advocacy for Impressionism is a main reason why there are such strong collections of art from this movement in North America. She also advised museums on the purchase of historical European art, so that aspiring artists could gain an artistic education at home.

## **HELEN MCNICOLL**

### **Picking Flowers**

around 1912

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of R. Fraser Elliott, Toronto, in memory of Betty Ann Elliott, 1992

92/102

**MARY CASSATT**

**Summertime**

1894

oil on canvas

Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection

1988.25