



**Art Gallery of Ontario**  
**Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario**

**E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives**

**Description & Finding Aid:**  
**Arthur Lismer and Marjorie Lismer Bridges Fonds**  
**CA OTAG SC021**

Amy Marshall Furness

Gary Fitzgibbon, 2012

## Arthur Lismer and Marjorie Lismer Bridges fonds

### Dates of creation:

1899–1986

### Extent:

21 cm of textual records

18 photographs

1 postcard

### Biographical sketch:

Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) was a British Canadian painter and art educator. He was born in Sheffield, England, studied at the Sheffield School of Art 1898–1905, and attended the Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten van Antwerpen/Académie royale des beaux-arts d'Anvers (Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp) in 1906–1907. In 1911 he immigrated to Canada where he worked in Toronto as a commercial illustrator for the Rapid Grip Engraving Company and later at Rous & Mann, and taught at the Ontario College of Art. He married Esther Mawson in 1912 and their only child Marjorie was born in 1913. In that year, he was secretary to the Graphic Arts Department at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.

His career as an art educator continued at the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax, 1916–1919, followed soon after by his appointment as vice-principal (1919–1927) of the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. In 1920 he became a founding member of the Group of Seven, which exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto for the first time that year.

Although he produced several large canvases for the Canadian Government of the naval harbour at Halifax after the First World War, his best-known works in oil are wilderness landscapes, expressionist in style with a use of raw colour and simplified form. He also produced many works on paper, including portraits and cartoon drawings. His work was exhibited with the Group of Seven at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, England in 1924.

Arthur Lismer established the Children's Art Centre at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario), where he was educational supervisor, 1929–1938. He spent a year in South Africa, 1936–1937, organizing children's art classes, then taught at Columbia University Teachers' College, 1938–1939. By invitation, Lismer lectured in England, France, the United States, Australia, South Africa, Hawaii, the Fiji Islands, and New Zealand. He was educational supervisor at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from 1941 to 1967. During this time, he was assistant professor of fine arts at McGill University, 1948–1954. In 1952–1953 he gave television talks on art in everyday life.

The Art Gallery of Toronto organized a retrospective exhibition of Arthur Lismer's work in 1950. In 1967 he was made a Companion of the Order of Canada. He died in Montreal in 1969 and was buried on the grounds of the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ont. A retrospective memorial exhibition of his work was held at the National Gallery of Canada in May, 1969.

Arthur Lismer was a member of the Canadian Society of Graphic Arts (1911), the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto (1912), the Ontario Society of Artists (1913), the Royal Canadian Academy (1946), the Canadian Group of Painters (founding member, 1933), the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour (listed in 1935) and the Federation of Canadian Artists. He held honorary doctorates from Dalhousie University (1942) and McGill University (1963). His publications *Canadian Picture Study* (1930) and *Education through Art for Children and Adults at the Art Gallery of Toronto* (1936) were issued by the Art Gallery of Toronto; he also wrote *A Short History of Painting* (Toronto: Andrews Bros., 1926) and the booklet *Water Colour Painting for Pleasure* ([S.l.]: Canadian YMCA War Services, [194-]).

Lismer's work is in most public collections in Canada, including the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa and the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ont.

Marjorie Lismer Bridges (1913–2006), who lived most of her life in Ashton, Maryland, devoted a number of years to organizing her father's archival records after his death, gradually donating them to public repositories. Her book on her father's drawings, *A Border of Beauty: Arthur Lismer's Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Red Rock), was published in 1977. She also wrote the "Arthur Lismer source book," included in this fonds.

**Custodial history:**

Materials now constituting the Arthur Lismer and Marjorie Lismer Bridges fonds were inherited by Arthur Lismer's daughter Marjorie after his death in 1969 and within a few years were donated to the Art Gallery of Ontario.

**Scope and content:**

Fonds consists of correspondence of Arthur Lismer, chiefly related to his professional activities as an art educator in Toronto and elsewhere during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; lists of Lismer's exhibited work; manuscripts of essays by Lismer and a synopsis of planned book; a source book on Lismer prepared by his daughter Marjorie Lismer Bridges; story outlines and a script of a National Film Board production about Lismer; photographs and clippings relating to Canadian painter Tom Thomson; memorabilia from the Arts and Letters Club (Toronto); art education pamphlets and other printed materials; a commonplace book inscribed by C.M. Manly; and photocopies of some of Lismer's lectures and radio broadcasts.

*Contains series:*

1. Correspondence
2. Exhibitions records
3. Writings
4. Secondary sources
5. Tom Thomson clippings and photographs
6. Printed and other miscellanea

**Notes:**

*Variations in title:*

Previously known as the Arthur Lismer Papers.

*Source of title proper:*

Title based on the provenance of the fonds.

*Physical description:*

Pen or pencil sketches by Arthur Lismer will be found on several items in the fonds as noted below.

*Immediate source of acquisition:*

AGO Credit Line: Gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges, 1976-1987.

*Restrictions on access:*

Open. Access to Special Collections is by appointment only. Please contact the reference desk for more information.

*Terms governing use and reproduction / publication:*

Copyright of material in the Arthur Lismer and Marjorie Lismer Bridges fonds remains with the heir(s) of the Lismer estate. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain permission to publish any part of the fonds.

*Finding aids:*

A detailed inventory of the fonds is available.

*Associated material:*

Library and Archives Canada holds archival materials of Lismer in its Arthur Lismer fonds (MG30-D184, R6076-0-1-E). — The University of Toronto, Victoria University Library at the University of Toronto and the National Gallery of Canada hold Lismer correspondence; see below at series 1: Correspondence.

*Accruals:*

No further accruals are expected.

**Related material:**

The Art Gallery of Ontario Institutional Archives holds material related to Arthur Lismer's teaching activities at the Gallery. — Lismer correspondence will be found in another AGO Library and Archives fonds; see below at series 1: Correspondence.

**General note:**

Titles of series, files and items are supplied and based on their contents, except where otherwise noted.

**Description control:**

Description and finding aid prepared by Gary Fitzgibbon, 2012. — Description based on *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD), Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 2008.

**Provenance access points:**

Lismer, Arthur, 1885–1969

Bridges, Marjorie Lismer, 1913–2006

**SERIES 1: CORRESPONDENCE****Dates of creation:**

[1914?]-1965

**Extent:**

3 cm of textual records

**Scope and content:**

Series comprises Arthur Lismer's correspondence, chiefly between the 1920s to 1950s, with officials at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa); the Children's Art Centre at the Art Gallery of Toronto; Charles S. Band, president of the Art Gallery of Toronto; with miscellaneous active (unsent) and passive correspondence; and typed transcripts of some handwritten letters.

**Notes:**

The University of Toronto Archives holds correspondence of Arthur Lismer in its Vincent Massey Personal Records fonds. — Victoria University Library at the University of Toronto holds his correspondence with Frederick Housser in its Yvonne McKague Housser fonds (no. 40). — Library and Archives Canada holds a letter (1916) from Lismer in its Tom Thomson collection (MG30 D284 Vol. 1, File 2). — The National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives holds a letter (1914) from Lismer in its Dr. James M. MacCallum papers.

The AGO Library and Archives holds Arthur Lismer correspondence in its C.S. Band fonds (SC017); see 'Charles S. Band correspondence' in this series.

Correspondence between Marjorie Lismer Bridges and library staff at the Art Gallery of Ontario regarding the donation of the Arthur Lismer materials was transferred to the administration file for this fonds in 2012.

Other correspondence will be found in series 2: Exhibitions records.

**Location: box 1**

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
National Gallery of	1920	2 folders of textual records	1-1
	1956		1-2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Canada correspondence		File contains correspondence to Arthur Lismer in Toronto and elsewhere from the Director of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, Eric Brown, his assistant H.O. (Harry Orr) McCurry and others between 1920 and 1956. The letters, some including pencil sketches, discuss Lismer's working life; art education, art events and personalities in Canada; and art exhibitions, including a Group of Seven exhibition (1922) and the British Empire Exhibition (1923). Several letters are handwritten. — Arrangement, by folder: (1-1) 1920-1929; (1-2) 1932-1956.	
Children's Art Centre correspondence	1938 1951	1 folder of textual records  File contains manuscript correspondence from Lismer to the staff of the Children's Art Centre at the Art Gallery of Toronto discussing his sentiments about art education; letters were written from Columbia University in New York (1938-1939), and afterwards from Ottawa. Includes typed transcripts.	1-3
Charles S. Band correspondence	1936 1950	1 folder of textual records  File contains correspondence to Lismer in South Africa, New York and Montreal from then-president of the Art Gallery of Toronto Charles Shaw Band in Toronto, between 1936 and 1949, commenting on events and committee affairs at the Gallery. The file also includes correspondence (1949-1950) from Harry Southam regarding Lismer's canvas <i>Sombre Isle</i> . The AGO Library and Archives' C.S. Band fonds (SC017) contains Lismer correspondence to Charles S. Band.	1-4
Miscellaneous passive correspondence	1921 1965	1 folder of textual records  File contains correspondence received by Lismer between 1921 and 1965 from various correspondents including Vincent Massey, Lewis Mumford, Barker Fairley, Marius Barbeau, Leo Mol and others; also from publishers, universities, art associations, galleries and schools. Some leaves have pen or pencil sketches on verso. Several letters are handwritten.	1-5
Miscellaneous active correspondence	[1914?] 1951	15 leaves of textual records  File contains manuscript correspondence of Lismer to Eric Brown, officials at the Ontario College of Art, and others, largely unfinished and unsent, on art education and other subjects. Includes typed transcripts of some letters, with notations by Marjorie Lismer Bridges.	1-6

**SERIES 2: EXHIBITIONS RECORDS****Dates of creation:**

1922–1958

**Extent:**

3 cm of textual records

**Scope and content:**

Series comprises lists of Arthur Lismer's paintings exhibited in commercial galleries in Canada in the 1930s to 1950s, and the Art Gallery of Toronto Lismer retrospective of 1950; with correspondence regarding a planned exhibition of the work of British art students in 1922, a show of Lismer's paintings in the Eaton's department store in Toronto in 1946, and the 1950 Lismer retrospective.

**Location: box 1**

<b>FILE OR ITEM TITLE</b>	<b>DATE(S)</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>BOX-FOLDER</b>
Gallery exhibitions lists	1935 1958	1 folder of textual records  File contains lists of paintings in exhibitions of Arthur Lismer's work at commercial galleries between 1935 and 1958 including J. Merritt Malloney (Toronto), W. Scott (Montreal), T. Eaton Co. Fine Arts (Toronto), Les Amis de l'Art (Montreal), and others. Some leaves have pen or pencil sketches on verso.	1–7
British art schools exhibition correspondence	1922	1 folder of textual records  File contains correspondence between Lismer, art consultant Robert Martin (London, England) and representatives of art schools and institutions in Canada regarding a proposed travelling exhibition of artworks by students in art schools in Britain in 1922.	1–8
T. Eaton Co. Fine Art Galleries correspondence	1946 1950	1 folder of textual records  File contains correspondence to Lismer from R.S. van Valkenburg of the Fine Arts Galleries of the T. Eaton Company in Toronto regarding an exhibition of Lismer's paintings on consignment to the gallery from January to July of 1946, along with borrowed works not for sale; with shipping documents and an exhibition list. Some leaves have pen sketches on verso.	1–9
Lisner retrospective (1950) exhibition records	1949 1951	1 folder of textual records  File contains correspondence to Lismer in Montreal from Sydney Key, curator at the Art Gallery of Toronto regarding the exhibition <i>Arthur Lismer: Paintings 1913–1949</i> at the gallery in January-February 1950, with a manuscript letter to Sydney Key in Lismer's hand (not sent); lists of paintings and a diagram of an installation; with an annotated proof of the	1–10

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
		catalogue for the exhibition. Some leaves have pen or pencil sketches Includes typed transcripts of handwritten material.	

**SERIES 3: WRITINGS****Dates of creation:**

[191-?]-[197-?]

**Extent:**

6 cm of textual records

**Scope and content:**

Series comprises manuscripts of a synopsis of a projected art textbook and notes and essays on art subjects by Arthur Lismer; with copies of other writings about art education.

**Location: boxes 1, 2**

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Essays on art education	1913 1937	1 folder of textual records  File contains a manuscript essay by Arthur Lismer entitled "The appreciation of pictures"; typescript or carbon copies of "Letters to African teachers of Bechuanaland," and "Suggestions for a proposed syllabus for the teaching of art in [South African] native schools"; and a mimeograph copy of five chapters of "The teaching of art in normal primary & secondary schools [in the Transvaal]." Includes a typed transcript of "The appreciation of pictures."	1-11
Notes on art subjects	1913 [193-?]	17 leaves of textual records File contains largely unfinished manuscript notes by Lismer on various art subjects, including "Calder" and "The meaning of beauty." Includes typed transcripts.	1-12
Synopsis of "Canadian art for the young"	[192-]	1 v. of textual records  Item is a notebook containing a manuscript synopsis, illustrated with small pen sketches, of a projected book by Lismer entitled "Canadian art for the young," intended for use by teachers in public schools. The binding of the notebook is brittle and fragile; some pages are loose. — Includes a typed transcript.	1-13
"Memorable"	1938	1 folder of textual records	2-1

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
meal" essay	[197-?]	File contains a manuscript essay (3 leaves) by Lismer entitled "A memorable meal," with a small pen sketch. The file also includes photocopies (probably made in the 1970s or '80s) of typescripts of Lismer's lectures and radio talks.	
"Canadian painting of today"	1929 [197-?]	1 folder of textual records  File contains galley sheets for an article by Lismer entitled "Canadian painting of today" dated 1929. The file also includes photocopies (probably made in the 1970s or '80s) of typed transcripts of Lismer's lectures and articles chiefly from the 1920s and '30s. Title taken from heading on first page of article.	2-2
"Tom Thomson, 1877-1917"	[191-?]	1 v. of textual records (17 p.)  Item is a manuscript essay by Lismer about Canadian painter and associate of the Group of Seven Tom Thomson (1877-1917), probably written shortly after Thomson's death. Title taken from cover of item.	2-3

#### SERIES 4: SECONDARY SOURCES

##### Dates of creation:

1950-1986

##### Extent:

3 cm of textual records

##### Scope and content:

Series comprises a source book on Arthur Lismer written by his daughter Marjorie Lismer Bridges and screenplay materials for a National Film Board of Canada production on Lismer's work.

##### Location: box 2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Arthur Lismer source book	1986	1 folder of textual records  Item is a book-length compendium of information about Arthur Lismer assembled by his daughter Marjorie Lismer Bridges, including a biographical recollection, bibliographies and a chronology of his life. Originally housed in a 3-ring binder, the contents were transferred to an archival folder in 2012. — A bound photocopy of the source book is available in the Rare Books	2-4

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
		collection of the AGO Library and Archives.	
National Film Board records	1950 [197-?]	1 folder of textual records  File contains two versions of the story outline for the documentary film <i>Lismer</i> (National Film Board, 1951) by Allan Wargon and a mimeograph copy of the shooting script. The file also includes photocopies of National Film Board correspondence to Lismer from Allan Wargon and others, possibly made in the 1970s.	2-5

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### SERIES 5: TOM THOMSON CLIPPINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

#### Dates of creation:

1907-[197-?]

#### Extent:

1 folder of textual records  
18 photographs : b&w prints  
1 postcard

#### Scope and content:

Series comprises photographs of Arthur Lismer's friend and fellow painter Tom Thomson (1877-1917) and places where they sketched landscapes together; clippings from the 1940s and '50s about Thomson; and some Thomson ephemera.

#### Location: box 2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Tom Thomson clippings	1926 [197-?]	1 folder of textual records 1 postcard  File contains a notice of the 1926 unveiling of Tom Thomson's painting <i>The Drive</i> at the Ontario Agricultural College (Guelph, Ont.), at which Arthur Lismer was principal speaker; an annotated picture postcard entitled "The Old School House Leith, Ontario," where Thomson went to school; clippings (1946-1956) from Canadian serials about Tom Thomson; a notice of an exhibition (1969) of Thomson paintings at the Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery (Owen Sound, Ont.). The file also includes a photocopy of a letter to Marjorie Lismer Bridges (1973) about a photo of her father with Tom Thomson; and a photocopy of an article in <i>The Studio</i> (1919) about Thomson, both probably made in the 1970s.	2-6

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Tom Thomson photographs	1907 1923	18 photographs : b&w prints ; 17 x 26 cm or smaller  File contains a studio portrait ([1907]) of Tom Thomson; a photo (dated 1914) of Thomson with Lismer in a canoe (4 copies, one a detail); four photos (dated 1923) of lakes in Algonquin Park, Ont.; photos of the Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn (Canoe Lake, Ont.); and other photos. Most are annotated on verso.	2-7

## SERIES 6: PRINTED AND OTHER MISCELLANEA

### Dates of creation:

1899-1968

### Extent:

6 cm of textual records

### Scope and content:

Series comprises some of Arthur Lismer's collection of materials on teaching art to children; memorabilia from his membership in the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto including some pen sketches; offprints of articles by his friend Marius Barbeau; a published book in which Lismer drew sketches; and a commonplace book once apparently belonging to Canadian artist Charles MacDonald Manly.

### Location: box 2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Art education booklets	1927 1946	2 v. of textual records  File contains art education booklets from Arthur Lismer's collection entitled <i>Drawing</i> (Toronto : Ontario Dept. of Education, 1927) (Art bulletin ; no 2), and <i>Art Education</i> (London : His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946) (Ministry of Education pamphlet ; no. 6).	2-8
Arts and Letters Club memorabilia	1911 1968	1 folder of textual records  File contains and 50 <sup>th</sup> (1958) and 60 <sup>th</sup> (1968) anniversary commemorative booklets of the Arts and Letters Club (Toronto); sheets (2) with pen sketches by Lismer on verso of song lyrics; and a play programme (1911).	2-9
Marius Barbeau offprints	1934 1959	1 folder of textual records  File contains offprints of articles by Canadian ethnographer and folklorist Marius Barbeau (1883-1969) from <i>The Scientific Monthly</i> (1942), <i>The Geographical Review</i> (1945)	2-10

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX- FOLDER
		and other periodicals, with autograph dedications to Arthur Lismer.	
Miscellaneous printed items	1924 1960	1 folder of textual records  File contains an offprint of an article in <i>Canadian Affairs</i> (1944) by Canadian painter Barker Fairley; and other material.	2-11
C.J. Holmes, Hokusai	1899	1 v. of textual records  Item is a copy of <i>Hokusai</i> by C.J. Holmes (London : Unicorn Press, 1899) inscribed "A. Lismer," with pen sketches by Lismer on the title page and back endpaper. Title taken from title page of book.	2-12
C.M. Manly, "Notes: various"	[191-?]	1 v. of textual records  Item is a commonplace book inscribed on the front endpaper "Notes: various / C.M. Manly, Toronto" (British Canadian artist Charles MacDonald Manly, 1855-1924) containing articles and poems by various authors, handwritten on blank pages bound into the cover of <i>Rory of Willow Beach</i> by Valance Patriarche (London : Cassell, 1912) from which the gatherings were removed. Title taken from inside front cover.	2-12