

## Emily Carr 1871-1945

Emily Carr was born in 1871 in Victoria, BC, studied art in San Francisco and returned to Victoria in 1893 to set up a studio and do some art teaching. Her first public showings of conventional watercolours were at the annual art shows at the Willows Park Fair in Oak Bay, which began in 1891.

In 1909 she became a charter member of Island Arts and Crafts Society. However, Carr soon felt herself stifled by the innate conservatism of most fellow members and impressed by post-impressionism during a sojourn in Paris, she re-shaped her style and began to produce the first modernist paintings ever seen in the province. The reception, even from many Society members, was mixed and sometimes hostile.

Meantime between 1908 and 1912 she engaged in a project to record totem poles in remote First Nation villages, working in watercolours. The following year she exhibited over two hundred of these images in Vancouver, but when the provincial government rejected her request to purchase this collection, discouragement caused her to virtually abandon the idea of professional painting for 15 years and resort to making a living as a landlady. However, her interest was re-kindled by an interested lodger named Mark Tobey, a brilliantly progressive Seattle artist.

In 1927 Carr was invited by Eric Brown, director of the National Gallery, to join an exhibition in Ontario, where she was introduced to members of the Group of Seven. Under such influences, Carr's painting reached fruition, and her work on First Nation and nature themes became popular, although her focus now shifted from aboriginal culture to the wider natural world. Despite such national acclaim, she struggled for due recognition in her own domain. She was disappointed at the lukewarm public reaction to the Modern Room as a section of the Society's annual exhibition in 1932, and a failure to launch a movement for a People's Art Gallery in Victoria.



*Seated on her Verandah  
Royal BC Museum, D-03843*

A first heart attack in 1937 began a process of steady decline in her health, and her interests gravitated to writing. She was to develop a reputation in this field, and her book *Klee Wyck* (1941) received the Governor General's Award. Several other books followed, some published posthumously.

More than half a century after her death in 1945, Emily Carr is regarded as a Canadian icon for her pre-eminence and originality as a pioneering artist, with an appeal now reaching beyond Canada's borders.



Uprooted Tree