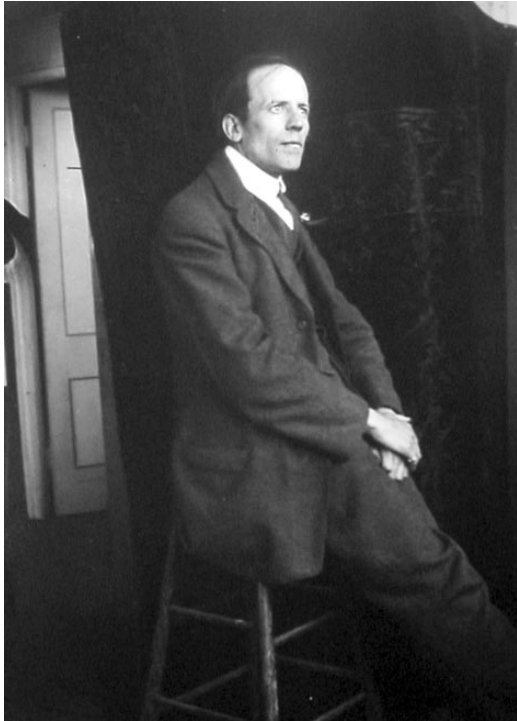


## ***The Group of Seven and the Halifax Harbour Explosion: Focus on Arthur Lismer***

*The text contained in this material is an excerpt from an extraordinary catalogue documenting Lismer's time in the Halifax area. The essay was written by Gemey Kelly, now the Curator of the Owens Art Gallery in Sackville, NB, for an exhibition at the Dalhousie University Art Gallery, of the seminal work Lismer did here.*

### **Arthur Lismer, Nova Scotia, 1916-1919**



“In the summer of 1916, the Directors of the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax advertised for a Principal...Lismer was subsequently offered the job, and ....wrote on August 18 to accept the position. (Marjorie Lismer Bridges, unpublished manuscript)

“The time was the middle year of the First World War. In Toronto, where Lismer had been living since his immigration to Canada in 1911, freelance commercial design jobs had become scarce and the sale of art almost negligible. Two of his closest friends, A.Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris, had enlisted, effectively breaking up the burgeoning group of young artists - later to become the Group of Seven - of which Lismer was a part. Although a firm foundation had been laid for their future consolidation, for the moment the energy of the group spirit had been diffused.

Photograph of Arthur Lismer, Victoria School of Art & Design, courtesy of Marjorie Lismer Bridges/Janet Bridges Cauffiel

...

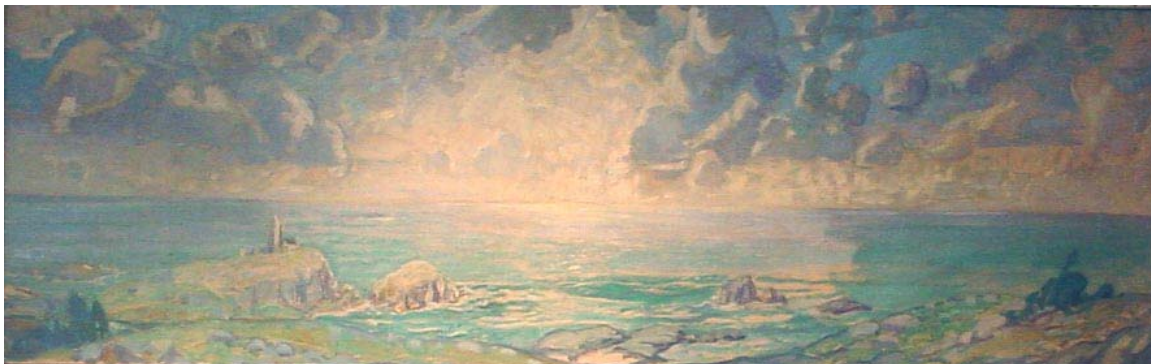
“Lismer’s tenure in Halifax signified more than a hiatus in the development of the Group of Seven and in the career of one of its members, however. Although a period of only .three years [1916-1919], it marked the beginning of Lismer’s work in art education and came at an important mid-point in his artistic development. He had received a complete, formal education in art and design in England, and had just spent five years of intense fraternity with several young artists in Toronto, especially A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thomson, and J.E.H. MacDonald. Together, they had formulated the notion of a truly Canadian painting, and under the exhilarating influence of Ontario’s north country, they had created a new painterly language of heightened colour and decorative line. When Lismer came to Halifax in the late summer of 1916, therefore, he was already a serious artist committed to his own painting, and prepared to embark on a new profession as an art educator.”

### ***Background: Sheffield and Toronto***

“Lismer was born in Sheffield, England in 1885, the son of a Sheffield draper and the middle of six children.... From an early age, one of Lismer’s distinguishing characteristics was a capacity for diverse kinds of experience combined with seemingly unbounded reserves of energy....In 1906, after his seven-year apprenticeship at the Sheffield School of Art, Lismer attended the Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp where he had been preceded by his Sheffield friend Frederick Varley. (Lismer, “The Early Years”, pp. 4-5) He returned to England in 1907-08 and by 1911, with little hope for a future there in commercial design, decided to emigrate to Canada....

“When Lismer arrived in Canada, ... after an unhappy month of work at one lithography firm..., he moved ... to the Grip Engraving Company. Already working when Lismer arrived were J.E.H. MacDonald...; Tom Thomson...; and F.H. Johnston. Shortly after Lismer began, Frank Carmichael was apprenticed, and MacDonald left to devote himself to painting. By the end of his first year in Canada then, Lismer had met four of the other six future members of the Group of Seven (the original members were Arthur Lismer, F.H. Varley, J.E.H. MacDonald, A.Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, F.H. Johnston, and Franklin Carmichael), as well as the important figure of Tom Thomson....”

“In 1915, Lismer shared a studio for a time with Thomson, and he moved to Thornhill, just north of Toronto, to be neighbours with MacDonald. War had been declared, Jackson had enlisted in the infantry in 1915, and Harris became a lieutenant in the Royal Grenadiers in the late spring of 1916. (Reid, “The Group of Seven, p. 176) Finally, in the late summer of that year Lismer accepted the job offer at the art school in Halifax...”



*View from Chebucto Head*, nd, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 244 cm, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design

### ***The Victoria School of Art and Design***

“When Lismer arrived, he found that the School was ... decrepit, housed on the top two floors of a drafty, wooden building, on the corner of Prince and Argyle Streets, with an enrolment of about twelve students. ... More disconcerting than the poor facilities and low enrollment, however, was the attitude of the School’s Directors and community apathy regarding art matters in general. Lismer wrote to Eric Brown, the young director of the National Gallery:

‘The school has been allowed to fall into disuse mainly on account of the lack of interest of its directors who regard art as an exclusive & cultured subject for the edification of the few - & the fewer the students the greater their pride in their connection with it, & its

exclusiveness.’ (Lismer to Brown, 28 January 1917, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada).

“Lismer attempted right away to bring in students. .... By March [1917] he had started a class in design, had seventy-two students, and began to feel genuinely encouraged. .... [By the second year] the School now offered courses in drawing, design, painting and colour, as well as special lectures and demonstrations. (Minutes of the Victoria School of Art and Design, 1 February 1918, Public Archives of Nova Scotia) .... In order to ensure an enrollment of advanced students and to give financial help to those who needed it, Lismer established twenty-five scholarships of free tuition. (Minutes of the Victoria School of Art and Design, 17 October 1918, Public Archives of Nova Scotia). Often he was unable to solicit students from the high schools and so encouraged small children to come on Saturdays, thereby beginning his famous children’s classes in art. (Interview with Lismer, “A Tribute to Arthur Lismer”, written by Laurence Nowry, CBC Tuesday Night, 1 April 1969)

“Lismer began to develop his theory of art education during the Halifax years, and it emerged, naturally enough, as an extension of his belief that art should be accessible to everyone. ... From a practical point of view, Lismer believed that the study of art appreciation and an understanding of what is beautiful and ordered would necessarily improve the quality of life all around us.

”In more specific ways, education in art for Lismer served the utilitarian purpose of improving and informing upon areas like industrial design, ...For those wishing a rigorous training in fine art, instruction was available ‘to encourage and develop special talent’. But the School also endeavoured ‘to provide instruction to students, craftsmen, teachers, public school scholars, and most of all to aid in the creation of an art loving public’. (Victoria School of Art and Design Calendar, 1917-18)

....

“In that first year too, Lismer was commissioned to execute a set of murals for the Green Lantern, a popular downtown restaurant and tea room which was moving into large new premises from its small stand in the Roy building where it had been since its opening in 1914. ...Lismer spent the entire summer on the project. ... The panels Lismer executed were landscape works, meant, when viewed together, to suggest something of the diversity of the Nova Scotian scene. They included a vista of lush farming country, a sheltered fishing village, a view of the harbour with troopships and tugs, and an expanse of ocean painted, perhaps, from Chebucto Head. Besides these, there were four decorative lunettes showing seasonal landscapes.

“The Green Lantern closed for one day for its move down the street to the Keith Building, and it opened November 30 in elaborate new premises. (Advertisement in the Morning Chronicle (Halifax), 29 November 1917). In the basement, a large locomotive boiler provided steam and hot water for the entire four storeys, and there was also space to house an ice cream and cold storage plant. On the first floor, candy, fruit and pastries were sold. There was also a fish pool and an ice cream parlour with a thirty-six foot soda

fountain. (“Halifax, Nova Scotia”, tourist booklet, compliments of the Green Lantern Restaurant, pp. 3-9). Halfway up to the second storey was an orchestra gallery, and on the second floor, where large dining rooms extended the whole block, the Lismer murals were installed.

### **THE NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS**

“When he arrived in Halifax, Lismer discovered that although the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts existed and possessed the nucleus of a collection, no effort had been made to sustain its activities... By the beginning of the new year Lismer had resurrected the old charter of the Museum, commenced a membership campaign, established the intention of purchasing something for the collection each year, and appointed himself as Secretary....

“The problem as Lismer perceived it, in both generating and sustaining interest in the Museum, had been that only very poor specimens of art existed in the collection.... This was a chance to promote the idea of a true Canadian art at a much more fundamental level than he and his colleagues had been doing in Toronto. ....

“...Lismer wrote to the National Gallery’s Director Eric Brown broaching the subject of a possible loan of works from Ottawa to Halifax (Lismer to Brown, 1 December 1916, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada), and by mid-December 1916, he had approval (Lismer to Brown, 12 December 1916, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada)....For the forthcoming loan, which was to remain in Halifax for a year, Lismer managed to generate much excited anticipation.... The selection which Brown ... sent was a strong representation of contemporary Canadian art and art since the early part of the century (Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts, Halifax, Exhibition of Paintings by Canadian Artists Loaned by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)....The enthusiasm generated by the exhibition prompted Lismer to write next to the Art Gallery of Toronto in order to borrow a selection of etchings. ...Lismer secured the loan...by May 19, 1917....

....

“In November Lismer arranged for more new work to be brought in, this time an exhibition of lithographs from the National Gallery which included work by Whistler, Fantin-Latour and pennell, and work from the Ontario Society of Artists. The daily press exclaimed that the show was “one of the finest ever presented to the Halifax public”... The gallery was now open six days and one evening a week to accommodate interested viewers, and subscriptions were still growing.

“In less than one week from that opening, however, all Lismer’s hopes for the fledgling gallery and his art school were overwhelmed by the horror of the Halifax explosion.

### ***The Halifax Explosion***

....

“Lismer was at home in Bedford about to sit down to breakfast with his wife, Esther, and daughter, Marjorie, when the explosion occurred. Soot from the stove began quietly to

drift down upon the white tablecloth, and the sound of the explosion followed almost immediately:

[Marjorie describes the event] ‘my father sent mother and me and the dog outside, thinking the trouble might be with the furnace in the basement. As he went down the cellar steps my mother called to him to say that whatever the trouble was it was near the city. Looking down the Basin to Halifax we could see a column of thick black smoke rising in the air.’ (Bridges, unpublished manuscript)

“His home was relatively undamaged, but when Lismer reached the art school everything inside the building was ‘a mess-up’: casts, window glass and property were smashed and broken. The interior of the gallery space upstairs suffered much damage. Lismer immediately sent a telegram to Brown on the 7th, followed directly by two letters to report on the damage to the National Gallery’s lithographs which had been on display. The centre wall in the gallery had collapsed, burying some of the prints beneath, and some of the frames had been flung across the room and broken. Two-thirds of all the glass in the frames had smashed. (Lismer to Brown, undated [December 1917], file copy in the National Gallery of Canada).

“*The Loved One*”, 1918, pen & ink drawing, 9.9 x 10.4 cm as printed in *The Drama of a City*, facing p. 182.



“Since all the windows in the building had been shattered, Lismer’s primary concern was the care of the School’s property and its protection from the onslaught of severe weather which almost immediately followed the explosion. Lismer asked [National Gallery Director Eric] Brown if he could keep the precious, unbroken glass from the lithographs in order to patch up the windows (Lismer to Brown, 10 December 1917, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada), and he wrote to [Art Gallery of Toronto curator full name?] Grieg:

‘Now all these are small things compared with the awful damage & death toll in the devastated area, that is indeed a woeful sight - & our 20,000 homeless (we are all caring for them) & the numerous blinded people - & the little children - a sight of any of these would depress the tenderest soul ... my school is full of coffins now & all boarded up’. (Lismer to Greig, 14 December 1917, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada)

“The initial reaction of the citizens of Halifax and Dartmouth was that the explosion had been an enemy attack and even after detailed reports of the accident were printed, people remained frightened and anxious. Lismer wrote that ‘we are all pretty “nervy” and anticipate other things’. (Lismer to Greig, 14 December 1917, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada). The situation was not alleviated by leading headlines like ‘When War Came to Halifax’, which appeared in the December 29 issue of the *Canadian Courier*

with on-the-spot sketches and drawings of the destruction supplied by Lismer. (“When War Came to Halifax As Seen by the Artist”, illustrations by Arthur Lismer, Canadian Courier 23 (1919); 10-11).... In the aftermath of the explosion, paranoia and suspicion grew and there was an increase in public watchdogging.”

“Lismer had discovered soon after his arrival in Halifax that it was impossible to draw or sketch anywhere near the waterfront area or at any land fortifications, and he confessed to Brown that on one occasion he had been arrested attempting to do so. (Lismer to Brown, 28 January [1917], file copy in the National Gallery of Canada). Feeling completely hamstrung at being unable to record the activity taking place all around him, he wrote Brown just after the explosion to ask if he might somehow obtain permission to sketch in the restricted areas. Without this, he wrote, “it is absolutely impossible to make sketches, it is forbidden strictly and almost useless.” (Lismer to Brown, 12 January 1918, the National Gallery of Canada). Even later when he was officially commissioned by the War Records and armed with special permits for all military areas, Lismer continued to be harassed and reported by the public. He complained, though somewhat forgivingly, that ‘the public make it a little unpleasant occasionally, they don’t understand. One of the local papers is lashing up an argument against landscape painters having access to docks etc. & I have been frequently reported as a suitable subject for internment. People who were previously cordial to me have discovered that I’m a suspicious character.’ (Lismer to Brown, 25 August 1918, the National Gallery of Canada).

“A.Y. Jackson, commenting years later on his own experiences as a War Artist, stated that in France he had encountered very few problems gaining access to the material he wished to record, but in Canada, ‘an artist is rushed at if he goes within a mile of a grain elevator. Meanwhile, the expert walks around getting precise information, photographs the whites of sentry’s eyes, and anything else he needs. If all the stuff the artists do was sent to Germany by special plane they could make no use of it. It might stir up some submerged feeling for beauty within some of them and so weaken their will towards destruction, but from the angle of conveying military information, it means nothing.’ (A.Y. Jackson, “Canada at War”, *Maritime Art* 2 (1942): 90)

“Regardless of these contingencies, Lismer did produce at least two large paintings of war subjects before he was formally commissioned as a War Artist. *Halifax Harbour - Time of War* was perhaps the first large war subject that Lismer tackled, but it was not a documentary treatment of the theme. The work depicts one of the more glorious sights of war - a large troopship camouflaged in ‘dazzle’ paint, set in a soft light diffused by clouds and smoke. Fully four-fifths of the painting is sky. This interest in sky and cloud formations derived from Lismer’s study of Constable and from a 19th century romantic tradition of landscape painting. He continued over the next few years to draw a very low horizon line in many of his works, but gradually moved it higher as he became less interested in panorama and more involved with the details and forms of the scene.



*Convoy and Tugs*, nd, oil on wood panel, 22.8 x 30.8 cm, Canadian War Museum

“Lismer exhibited *Halifax Harbour - Time of War* at the spring joint RCA/OSA exhibition, just before he was commissioned by the War Records office in June 1918. Winter Camouflage, most likely done over the winter of 1917-18, was also submitted to the exhibition. ... In both these works, Lismer displays a fascination for the dazzle painting on the sides of the large troopships and employs it as an integral part of the design. Later, in the larger War Records painting *Convoy in Bedford Basin* he uses the variations of the colour and the markings of the dazzle to unify the entire canvas.



*Convoy in Bedford Basin*, nd, oil on canvas, 91 x 260 cm, Canadian War Museum

....

### ***The War Records***

“The inspirational force behind the Canadian War Records was Lord Beaverbrook, an expatriate Canadian living in England, who was concerned that Canadians at home should be aware of what Canadian troops abroad were doing. (Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, *Tragic Victory*, Exhibition Catalogue, 1978) To that end, he wrote voluminously on Canadian troop activities,...and established the Canadian War Memorials in order to commission artists to record the details of war at the front.

“Most of the artists who were commissioned were British soldiers appointed or transferred from active service, but the Royal Canadian Academy soon protested this preponderance of British artists employed to record Canadian troop activity. Through the intervention of Sir Edmund Walker, who was Beaverbrook’s advisor in Canada and a member of the War Memorials Committee, the field was expanded to include more Canadians.

“In March 1918, F. H. Varley, J.W. Beatty, Charles Simpson and Maurice Cullen were commissioned, given the rank of honorary captain, and sent abroad as War Artists. Meanwhile, A.Y. Jackson, who had been wounded in France and sent to London to recover, was commissioned there directly by Lord Beaverbrook that spring.

“In January of that year, Lismer heard that several of the artists he knew were being sent to the Front and he wrote to Brown asking if permits could be obtained that would allow him to record some of the war-related activity taking place in Halifax. Brown misunderstood Lismer’s letter as a request to be considered as a War Artist in Halifax, and forwarded it to Sir Edmund Walker. At the same time he counselled Lismer to write to the RCA which had just selected the group of artists to go abroad. (Brown to Lismer, 19 January 1918, Canadian War Museum). Sir Edmund took the concept of commissioning Canadian artists to work on the war material at home very seriously and over the winter, a decision was made to include a Home Work Section in the War Records scheme. (Walker to Brown, 21 January 1918, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada). That spring, Brown wrote to officially commission Lismer as an artist for the Canadian War Records, giving him a free hand to select the subjects he thought most appropriate. (Brown to Lismer, 8 June 1918, Canadian War Museum).

....

“The first canvas that Lismer proposed to Brown after being formally commissioned by the War Records in June 1918, was ‘a painting of the basin [Bedford Basin] with a large fleet of transports ready for overseas’ (*Convoy in Bedford Basin*) (Lismer to Brown, 25 August 1918, the National Gallery of Canada); ‘I have in mind a very complete rendering of this subject - decorative in feeling, the varied camouflaging of the boats with an interesting background gives one a good chance to do something with the subject.’ (Lismer to Brown, 24 September 1918, the National Gallery of Canada)....

“That summer, the English painter Harold Gilman was sent to Halifax by Lord Beaverbrook with a commission to paint a Halifax Harbour picture. Lismer found him ‘an excellent fellow’ (Lismer to Brown, 14 June 1918, the National Gallery of Canada) and they got along well. Though given a military pass, Gilman encountered the same problems of access to the waterfront that Lismer had, and on one excursion to the Dartmouth side was stopped and interrogated by the harbour authorities. The daily newspaper seized upon the story and published an account of Gilman’s ‘arrest’. Lismer sent the clipping to Brown, adding that ‘it is merely an inflated description of how one man asked for the other’s credentials, the incidentals of pursuit and capture are absurd & did not happen.’ (Lismer to Brown, 27 June 1918, the National Gallery of Canada).

...

“By the late summer ... perhaps because Lismer had not seemed to make a productive start, Brown invited him to come to Toronto, at the War Office’s expense, to meet with Sir Edmund Walker and himself, and show what work he had done to date. (Brown to Lismer, 1 October 1918) ... Just a few days after the receipt of Brown’s letter Lismer embarked on a period of intense material gathering. ...

On October 11 [Lismer] went out for a day and night with the minesweepers (Lismer to Brown, 12 October 1918, the National Gallery of Canada) which resulted in several sketches, including HMS Hampshire at Sea. A week later he went aboard a submarine chaser to obtain details about the boat, visited a seaplane station, and boarded the Canadian torpedo boat Grilse. (Lismer to Brown, 17 October 1918; and 25 October 1918, the National Gallery of Canada). He made numerous sketches and drawings of these subjects which resulted in suggestions to Brown for several more paintings, including one of the minesweepers in formation. (Lismer to Brown, 17 October 1918, the National Gallery of Canada)...

“A significant part of Lismer’s War Records work was in the form of a set of lithographs. ...For the opening of the exhibition of lithographs at the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts in November 1917, he had prepared a demonstration print and exhibited it along with the stone. (Lismer to Brown, 24 November 1917, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada)...

“A few weeks after doing the demonstration print, Lismer sent this lithograph *The Transport* to Brown as a Christmas present. Brown liked it well enough to suggest that Lismer send a print to the national Gallery for consideration of purchase by the Trustees. (Brown to Lismer, 19 January 1918, Canadian War Museum). The following year, when Brown commissioned Lismer as a War Artist, he reminded him of the lithograph and expressed the hope that he would keep the idea of a set of lithographs in mind. (Brown to Lismer, 8 June 1918, Canadian War Museum)...



*The Transport, Halifax, NS, 1917, lithograph, 37.3 x 28.3 cm, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia*

“Lismer’s working procedure incorporated lithographs well enough. He gathered information in the form of quick sketches, worked them into finished drawings and then duplicated them on the plate or stone. In many instances, he used the lithograph as a way of recording a subject which might not be commissioned as a canvas. He saw the medium ‘as a “graphic” way of reproducing an idea’, (Lismer to Brown, 14 June 1918, the National Gallery of Canada) and utilized it as a way of producing data about war activities to supplement the colour work.

....

“After [a] first group of prints had been sent off [to the War Records office], Lismer continued to work on others, completing an additional seven by the early summer, bringing to sixteen the total of his lithographic contribution to the War Records. (Brown to Lismer, 2 April 1919, and Lismer to Brown, 1 October 1919)

“Peace was declared in November 1918, and the great engines of war shifted slowly into reverse. The thousands of troops which had embarked from Halifax had now to be returned home, and the troopships began to bring them back on a schedule of rapid sailings. On November 28, the *Aquitania* docked, and on December 14, the *Olympic* arrived at Pier 2 carrying 5,354 soldiers. (“Pier Two’s Epic Port”, newspaper clipping, undated, in Scrapbook of G.M. Wood, Halifax, Public Archives of Nova Scotia). There was a large and joyful reception, and Lismer was there: ‘The *Olympic* which has carried so many of the Canadians over, docked here last week. It was a magnificent sight - & is the most typical of all such subjects - there will be many such of course & I shall have good opportunity to study them.’ (Lismer to Brown, 24 December 1918, the National Gallery of Canada). In the same letter he listed ‘the return of a transport [the *Olympic*] as one of a possible five paintings he wished to do for the War Records. Brown wrote to say that he could proceed with one more canvas, and by March Lismer wrote that *The Olympic with Returned Soldiers* was nearly half finished. (Brown to Lismer, 20 January 1919, Canadian War Museum, and Lismer to Brown, 17 March 1919, the National Gallery of Canada).

....

*Home Again – Landing at Pier 2, Halifax, 1918-1919*, lithograph, 39.8 x 34.7, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

“On December 30, Lismer went to see the docking of the *Carmania* and managed to get very close to the gangplank. He did numerous sketches of the troops disembarking, carrying all of their equipment. (Lismer to Brown, 30 December 1918, the National Gallery of Canada). Some of the men posed for him, and Lismer recorded their names and addresses at the top of his sketchbook. The composite of these portraits became the lithograph *Home Again*. At this time, Lismer was reporting to Ottawa that traffic in the harbour was very heavy, and Brown suggested that if Lismer wished it, someone could be sent down to assist in gathering the material on this final phase of the war. (Brown to Lismer, 19 December 1918, Canadian War Museum). Lismer at first replied quite simply that it was up to Brown. (Lismer to Brown, 24 December 1918, file copy in the National Gallery of Canada). A week later, however, he received a letter from A.Y. Jackson who had returned from England and was now in Montreal and eager to do some of the Halifax



material....That evening Lismer wrote to Brown, suggesting that Jackson be considered for a commission in Halifax. (Lismer to Brown, 30 December 1918, the National Gallery of Canada)

....

“Jackson was there by February 3rd, and stayed with the Lismers at least part of the time. ...It was wonderful for the two friends to be together again: ‘It was like old times,’ Jackson wrote in his autobiography, ‘swapping experiences with him, considering plans for the future, and looking around for subjects to paint’. (A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter’s Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson*, Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1958, p.51) Still, compared with his experience at the Front and in England, the gathering of material in Halifax did not entirely please Jackson. This was presumably because the present situation required more straightforward documentation than had been required in France. Lismer explained to Brown:

‘I’m very much interested in War Records but there are times when I’d like to let go at something & forget the facts. To be really honest with the stuff means that everything should be put down as it happened - for example, the Olympic came in with returned soldiers after the armistice was signed - on a gray day, with a pretty even & dull light, not a day one would choose for a fine scheme - & yet there are 5,000 troops & thousands of people who will remember that day & it has to be absolutely correct as to wind, weather and tide, etc. I think Jackson prefers the western front where you can put your subject under any scheme you wish.’ (Lismer to Brown, 25 March 1919, the National Gallery of Canada).

“Jackson did several works on the Halifax subject matter, including *Entrance to Halifax Harbour* which was later purchased by the Tate Gallery in England. ....

“Over the winter of 1918-1919, the demands on Lismer’s time and energy increased. ... Since the signing of the peace in November, he had been busily trying to complete the War Records material which he had begun, ...From January on he worked steadily to finish the three large canvases. (Lismer to Brown, 15 January [1919]; Lismer to Brown 17 March 1919, the National Gallery of Canada). ... Certainly, Jackson’s visit had a profound effect on Lismer’s state of mind at this time. Through their painting trips together and their discussions of art and the future, they had renewed their friendship and rekindled all the old Toronto associations. By the middle of March, ... as Jackson was preparing to leave, [Lismer wrote] to Brown: ... ‘So taking everything into consideration I imagine I am better away from here & someday I’m going to clear out.’ (Lismer to Brown, 17 March 1919, the National Gallery of Canada).

.....

“... [In] April ... J.E. H. MacDonald wrote telling [Lismer] to expect an offer of the vice-Principalship at the Ontario College of Art. The Principal, George Reid, confirmed this in a letter written the same day (McLeish, John A.B., *September Gale: A Study of Arthur*

Lismer of the Group of Seven. Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1955, p. 65), and Lismer accepted.

“Lismer’s activities in Halifax did not immediately cease with this change of plans for the future. He continued on with the War Records, and by July was still gathering material at the harbour fortifications for a new lithograph. (Lismer to Brown, 7 July 1919, the



National Gallery of Canada). He also continued to work on the paintings over the summer, and it was not until the fall that he presented his final inventory to the War Records Office: the three canvases, *Convoy in Bedford Basin*; *Minesweepers, Halifax*; *The Olympic with Returned Soldiers* - and a set of sixteen lithographs.

....

*The Olympic with Returned Soldiers*, nd (illegible), oil on canvas, 123.1 x 163.1, Canadian War Museum

“Twenty years later, the Victoria School of Art and Design, .... conferred upon Lismer an Honorary Diploma. ... Arthur Lismer left Nova Scotia on August 19, 1919. .... [I]n Halifax he had achieved a great deal. The Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts now had a strong membership from which to draw continued life, and the Victoria School of Art and Design had become substantial enough to attract and keep an experienced administrator...Lismer himself had gained the administrative and teaching experience necessary to confidently take on the Vice-Principalship of the largest art school in the country and, more importantly perhaps, he had painted regularly during these three years - much of the time on demand - on a scale and of a variety which he had not attempted before. Lismer’s final act before taking leave of Halifax had been to hold his first solo exhibition, a display of fifty-three works, at the Victoria School of Art and Design. It was his largest exhibition to date, and indicated a desire to have his colleagues and the Halifax public see his work. It was also a summing up, an acknowledgement of the beauty of the Nova Scotian landscape and the sea, and the role that Halifax had played in the Great War.”

Essay text excerpted from:

Kelly, Gemey. Arthur Lismer: Nova Scotia, 1916-1919 (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1982)

Credits for the artwork that appear throughout this document are listed with each image.

Please note the image of *The Loved One* (page 5) appears courtesy of Alan Ruffman.