

39 Lawren Stewart Harris

ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA TPG 1885 – 1970

Composition 10

oil on canvas, on verso signed, inscribed *Vancouver, BC* and stamped Lawren Harris LSH Holdings Ltd. 79, 1937
40 x 32 ¼ in, 101.6 x 81.9 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist
LSH Holdings Ltd., Vancouver
Martin Diamond Fine Art, New York, 1983
Heffel Gallery Limited, Vancouver, 1990
Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, 1993 – 1996
Sold sale of *Canadian Art*, Joyner Fine Art,
November 15, 1996, lot 58
Private Collection, Victoria

LITERATURE

Augustus Bridle, “Canadian Art Group Opens 1937 Salon,”
The Toronto Daily Star, November 19, 1937, page 9
American Art Today, Gallery of American Art Today,
New York World’s Fair, National Arts Society,
no. 211, 1939, reproduced page 92
Alfred Morang, “Lauren [sic] Harris, Tireless Experimenter,”
New Mexico Daily Examiner, circa 1939, reproduced
upside-down
Alfred Morang, “100 Artists Show Vitality of Southwest
Art in Fiesta Show,” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*,
September 1, 1939, page 1
Paul Duval, “Lawren Harris’s Switch to Abstract Art Annoys
Some, Stimulates Others,” *Saturday Night*, no. 54, October 9,
1948, reproduced page 2, titled as *Mountain Form No. 6*
Charles C. Hill, *Canadian Painting in the 1930s*,
National Gallery of Canada, 1975, page 79, note 80
Barbara Gallati, “Lawren Harris,” *Arts Magazine*, vol. 58,
no. 5, January 1984, titled as *Painting #79*, page 50
Dennis Reid, *Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Work of
Lawren S. Harris*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985, pages 26,
30 and 73, reproduced page 72
Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land: Lawren Harris’s
Work and Life—An Interpretation*, 1993, pages 133 and 135,
reproduced plate 41
Megan Bice, *The Informing Spirit: Art of the American Southwest
and West Coast Canada, 1925 – 1945*, 1994, pages 82 and 165,
dated circa 1937, reproduced plate 83

Andrew Hunter, *Lawren Stewart Harris: A Painter’s Progress*,
The Americas Society, 2000, page 68, reproduced figure 35,
page 53
James King, *Inward Journey: The Life of Lawren Harris*, 2012,
page 267
Steve Martin et al., *The Idea of North: The Paintings of
Lawren Harris*, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015, reproduced
figure 39, page 131

EXHIBITED

Canadian Group of Painters, Toronto, November 19 –
December 19, 1937, traveling in 1938 to Montreal and
Ottawa, titled as *Composition – 10*, catalogue #32
New York World’s Fair, *American Art Today*, 1939, catalogue #211
Fiesta Show, Santa Fe, August – September 1939
Vancouver Art Gallery, *15th Annual British Columbia Artists’
Exhibition*, September 21 – October 13, 1946, titled as
Mountain Form VI, catalogue #52
Little Centre, Victoria, *Exhibition of Abstract Paintings
by Lawren Harris*, October 29 – November 17, 1946,
titled as *Mountain Form VI*, catalogue #1
Art Gallery of Toronto, *Harris*, October 16 – November 14,
1948, titled as *Abstract Painting*, catalogue #70
Willistead Art Gallery, Windsor, *Lawren Harris*, March 19 –
April 2, 1958, traveling to the Elsie Perrin Williams
Memorial Art Museum, London, Ontario
Martin Diamond Fine Arts, New York, *Lawren Harris
(1885 – 1970): Paintings of the Late Thirties*, November 8 –
December 10, 1983 (reproduced on the exhibition invitation),
titled as *Painting #79*, circa 1938
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Atma Buddhi Manas:
The Later Work of Lawren Harris*, September 27 –
November 24, 1985, traveling in 1986 to the Vancouver Art
Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of
Nova Scotia, Halifax, catalogue #23
London Regional Art Gallery, *The Logic of Ecstasy*, March 10 –
April 22, 1990, titled as *Untitled #79*, catalogue #41
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, *The Informing
Spirit*, January 30 – April 17, 1994, traveling in 1994 – 1995 to
the Vancouver Art Gallery; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center;
and Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, catalogue #83



FOLLOWING THE TRIUMPHANT compositions Lawren Harris developed during his 1930 trip to the Arctic with A.Y. Jackson, the rest of the first half of the 1930s was troubled. He was painting very little and the Group of Seven was dissipating. His life was in crisis—his marriage was in a shambles, and in 1934 he left his wife of 24 years, Trixie, for his friend’s wife, Bess Housser. The new couple filed for divorces in Reno, Nevada, that summer, married a few weeks later, and to avoid the scandal’s fallout in Toronto society, left Toronto for Hanover, New Hampshire.

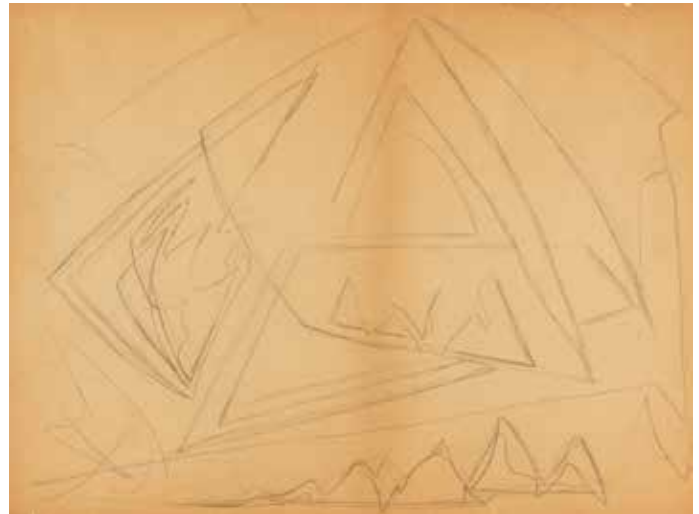
Soon after his arrival in Hanover, Harris resumed painting and continued to abstract his images more overtly. He was also actively exhibiting in Boston and New York. Back in the swing of things, Harris executed his graphite drawing *Study for Composition 10*, circa 1937. Like his other abstractions of the period, this one derives from the landscape. A large triangular mountain defined by straight edges and arcs radiating laterally from its peak hovers above a predella of a mountain range. From the study to the painting, Harris made a 90-degree counter-clockwise rotation, eliminated the predella imagery and developed a more sophisticated linear design that engaged his awareness of Jay Hambidge’s book *Dynamic Symmetry* (1920).

Following Roald Nasgaard’s convincingly drawn connections between Harris’s aesthetic and the modern art and design he saw in the United States, *Composition 10*’s luminous overlapping and intersecting surfaces suggest images of industrial objects included in publications such as the Museum of Modern Art’s *Machine Art* (1934). The translation of textures into black and white, photography’s “objectivity,” and the disruption of size and scale through reproduction are reworked by Harris into paintings with no hint of scale. These works used his distinctive blues, yellows, burnt sienna and raw umber and created new worlds of internal light and logic.

Composition 10 was one of four abstract paintings Harris sent back to Canada for inclusion in his first showing of abstract paintings, at the 1937 *Canadian Group of Painters* exhibition. In his review of the exhibition, Augustus Bridle, an early champion of the Group of Seven, expressed disappointment with Harris’s abstractions, saying they were “just mystic symbolism, elegant, ghostly, impossible.” Not for the first time, Bridle was unprepared for Harris’s new paintings.

Composition 10 was well beyond Harris’s Canadian peers and more attuned with the Russian artist El Lissitzky’s *Proun* paintings, three of which were shown in the Société Anonyme’s 1927 *International Exhibition of Modern Art* at the Art Gallery of Toronto, a show for which Harris had advocated. *Composition 10* is like some of the *Prouns* as it is a viable composition from any orientation—it was reproduced upside-down in New Mexico around 1939 and was listed as a horizontal painting in the 1948 Art Gallery of Toronto exhibition catalogue.

From Hanover, the Harrises moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in September 1938 and became engaged with the abstract



LAWREN S. HARRIS
Study for Composition 10
graphite on paper, circa 1937
18 x 23 ¾ in, 45.7 x 60.3 cm
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, cat. #85.4
Gift of Mrs. Maragret H. Knox

Not for sale with this lot

painters who formed the Transcendental Painting Group that year. In late September of 1938, Harris wrote Eric Brown (director of the National Gallery of Canada) asking for the four abstractions shown in the 1937 *Canadian Group of Painters* exhibition to be sent to him in Santa Fe, and they appear to have been entered in Harris’s exhibitions there. He was included in the *American Art Today* show at the 1939 World’s Fair when his Transcendental Painting Group colleagues were charged with selecting art from New Mexico and included him as one of their own.

Soon after Harris’s 1948 Art Gallery of Toronto retrospective, Northrop Frye described Harris’s incremental developments as metamorphoses punctuated by periods of experiment. To Frye, Harris was the only important revolutionary painter in Canada, and in a nearly 60-year career with many turns and triumphs, *Composition 10* stands out as one of his sure-footed statements of ambition and achievement.

We thank Gregory Humeniuk, art historian, curator and author, for contributing the above essay. The author is indebted to Dennis Reid’s cataloguing of *Composition 10* in his catalogue *Atma Buddhi Manas*.

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 400,000



Dennis Reid, Northrop Frye and Fredrik S. Eaton in front of *Composition 10*
at *Atma Buddhi Manas*, Art Gallery of Ontario, September 26, 1985
Photo: Art Gallery of Ontario, A-155134

318b LAWREN STEWART HARRIS ALC BCSFA CGP FCA G7 OSA RPS TPG 1885 - 1970 Canadian Rocky Mountain Drawing 9 - 39
graphite on paper on verso inscribed "Book 9 - 39" 7 1/2 x 9 7/8 inches 19 x 25.1 centimeters Provenance: Exhibited: Literature: Starting
Bid: Estimate: Preview at: Estate of Lawren Stewart Harris Estate of Howard K. Harris Glenbow.