

2.10 Aesthetic Values: Celebrating the Art of the Ottawa River Watershed

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The Ottawa River watershed is a place of great natural beauty. The majestic Ottawa itself flows over 1200 kilometres from its source in the wilderness of northwestern Quebec, with at least ten major tributaries, including wild and beautiful rivers such as the Madawaska, Petawawa, Dumoine, Coulonge, Black, Gatineau, and Lievre; and less wild but still beautiful rivers such as the Bonnechere, Rideau and South Nation. There are vast, wild expanses of forest as well, including large swaths of boreal spruces and many wonderful pine and hardwood forests and glades. Countless are the places in the watershed where a connection to the great mystery lies very close indeed.

It is no surprise then that the Ottawa River watershed has been a source of inspiration for artists dating from thousands of years back. One significant example of ancient art, dating from at least 3,000 years ago, is Oiseau Rock or *Migizi Kiishkaabikaan*, as it is called in Algonquin language. Situated on a cliff on the Ottawa River, Oiseau Rock is a sacred pictograph site. The Algonquin today describe it as a beautiful, powerful, place where the earth's energy is exposed and where the pictographs represent their ancient traditional understanding of the spiritual and physical landscape.

Perhaps the most famous modern painter to draw inspiration from the watershed was Tom Thompson. Thompson painted many beautiful images in Algonquin Park, most of which is in the watershed. One of his most famous paintings, "The Jack Pine", was inspired by the shores of Grand Lake near Achray, in 1916. A curator at the National Gallery wrote of this painting that it is "an icon embodying the spirit of the land and the Canadian experience of nature".

Figure 2.80 Ottawa River



Source: John Alnstead

Figure 2.79 River Spirit



Source: Kathrin Winkler

In the early to mid-1900s, most, if not all members of the Group of Seven painted extensively in the Ottawa River watershed. Scenes included the countryside outside of Montreal (A.Y. Jackson and J.E.H. MacDonald), the more northerly wilderness near Mattawa (Franklin Carmichael and J.E.H. MacDonald), the southeastern edge of the watershed in Bancroft (A.J. Casson) and Algonquin Park, to which members were introduced by Tom Thompson. In later years, many of the group frequently visited the Combermere area for some autumn painting. In the 1950s and early

1960s, A.Y. Jackson created a number of paintings around Lake Clear and the Opeongo Line while visiting a friend at his Lake Clear cottage.

Earlier examples of watershed art include a number of paintings by Frances Anne Hopkins, a British artist who painted detailed, naturalistic canoe scenes as she traveled through the watershed in a Voyageur canoe with her husband, an inspector for the Hudson's Bay Company. One of her most famous paintings was "Shooting the Rapids", now an icon in Canadian Voyageur heritage. Many other 1800s era paintings from the watershed depicting early life and scenes of nature on the Ottawa and its tributaries are housed in the National Archives of Canada.

Legions of contemporary artists draw inspiration from the Ottawa River watershed today, working in all kinds of media from wood and metal to paint and paper, often incorporating elements of nature in their designs.

Hoping in a small way to increase appreciation for the works of watershed artists and make their works available to a wider audience, the Ottawa River Institute (ORI) has launched an on-line art gallery of contemporary works from the Ottawa River watershed. The gallery can be viewed at www.ottawariverinstitute.ca. The ORI gallery also aims to increase appreciation for the majestic Ottawa River watershed itself. In the words of one of the gallery's on-line artists, Kathrin Winkler of Morrison Island, "The arts open a door to seeing and cherishing the beauty that surrounds us - and if that door is opened wide enough we will strive to protect that life-giving gift of river and sky."

Figure 2.81 The Deep



The ORI gallery currently contains work from painters Kathrin Winkler, John Macgillivray, John Bateson and John Almstedt, and photographer and hand-made paper artist Edith Hanatschek.

2.10.1 Selected Ottawa River Poetry

Outaouais

By Jamie MacKinnon, 2004

All the flowing vowels
trail
and fade

All the firm avowals made
on this river and on
its granite shores
reverberate...

Tales, tall and small

Champlain
Henry
Mufferaw
made myth
fed dreams
that nourish still

Yet this charged current
that flows from heart to ocean
substrate of our dreams
is sometimes misimagined
as glinting blade
fatal barb rammed deep
asseverating
nation

So little time ago
this highway
as they called her
this certain invitation
to probe the deeper heartland
was serenely busy
with *canots de maitre* and pointers
and tugs and rafts
and steamers and
above the rapids
by the mounds
where "grave goods"
ochre
copper
pipes
lie
companion bones
long gone
in acid soil
above the rapids could still be heard
the shouts and songs of bucherons

She's best imagined
says Tessouat
lord of entrepot
enterprising toll taker
first to greet the aliens
not as blade, but stem
with veins
Matabichuan, Kipawa
Madawaska, Petawawa

Mississippi...

I know many
no one knows them all
but understand this
you should understand this
we Kitchisipirini
 we people of the Big River
understand this: the price of passage

But canoes are microbes
and smallpox
and the Iroquois
and
chop chop chop chop chop chop chop
messieurs
Bronson, Bryson
Booth and Eddy
and
cobble
stitch
invent
amend
in the making of a larger nation
as Cartier and Macdonald
were fabricating
 *"C'est clair que ce n'est pas parfait,
 mais on doit s'efforcer..." »*
they could look down
from the parliamentary precinct
 below the falls
 below the straitened stretch
 where the water foams
and see more lumberyards and sawmills
than any place in the world
and watch the green hands
do their pike pole dance

from below
a local *gars de hache*
could and did look up
and seeing gentlemen and power
 if not their individual features
saluted *les nobles en haut*

In twenty years
the sons of these green hands

and the son
of that *gars de hache*
 rivermen, all
left this river
to ascend another
 the Nile
to rescue "Chinese" Gordon
 one myth flows
 into another

Here now
in this glaciated hillscape
where granite bluffs
and the hard bold end of the north
meets south and soil
where the scabble slopes erode
the ache of myth
and misremembered dream
I stand on escarpment edge
with pumpkin-coloured
veiny leaf in hand
and look down
through October's silver smoke
on this ribbon of memory
 coursing
 coursing
in sovereign potency
 this Manitou of water
 this Outaouais of light

The Ottawa River

By Wilfred Campbell, ca. 1900

Out of the northern wastes, lands of winter and death,
Regions of ruin and age, spaces of solitude lost;
You wash and thunder and sweep,
And dream and sparkle and creep,
Turbulent, luminous, large,
Scion of thunder and frost.
Down past woodland and waste, lone as the haunting of even,
Off shriveled and wind-moaning night when Winter hath
 wizened the world;
Down past hamlet and town,
By marshes, by forests that frown,
Brimming their desolate banks,
Your tides to the ocean are hurled.