

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
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Landscape by Yulia Biriukova

Bring Your Thing: Agnes Road show
20 July 2024

SPEAKERS

Anna Holmes, DW

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TRANSCRIPT

[Music]

Anna Holmes: And I was most looking forward to this one because I was really curious about what you and your wife might bring in.

DW: Yeah.

AH: I know a bit about the story from what's been shared with me about the connection. And I'd love to know more, you know, of your family's history, your wife's history.

DW: Yeah. Well, I'm certainly not the expert. So I can tell you what I've gleaned from being part of the family for 24 years. So I do know that Yulia was born in 1895.

AH: Yeah.

DW: And her father was one of the head engineers in terms of construction engineers on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

AH: So interesting.

DW: So the girls lived and were educated in rail cars across Russia. And I'm not sure at the end, as the revolution was ending, they were in Vladivostok. And due to their I guess white Russian class, they stayed put and got to know some British sailors. The British had a battleship docked there. And British intelligence apparently had heard that they were targeted for execution as part of the upper class by the Bolsheviks. They spirited them out on the ship, the whole family, to Hong Kong where they stayed for I believe a couple of years.

AH: Is that right? Okay.

DW: And Mary, the youngest daughter, married one of the officers. And Mary is my wife's grandmother.

AH: Okay, that's the connection. Okay.

DW: And Roger Dickinson was an officer on the British ship. And they stayed in Hong Kong for a while, and the rest of the family went to Europe. And then that's where they separated. So Mary went off, they ended up in San Francisco and then eventually in Northern Ontario. And then Yulia, the father passed away before I believe in Venice. But in Venice, Alexandra studied architecture and Yulia continued studying art. And in 1929, Yulia and Alexandra came to Canada just as the Depression, I guess.

AH: And just the two of them then,

DW: Just the two of them. Yeah. The mother, I believe, stayed in Europe and the father passed over there.

AH: Okay.

DW: And I don't know the details, but I do know that upon arriving in Toronto in 1929, they got to know J.E.H. MacDonald through the art community.

AH: Yeah.

DW: Friendship was struck up. And Yulia ended up painting in the Severn Street Studio.

AH: That's right. I read that. Yeah.

DW: And she and Alexandra actually lived there for five years in the building.

AH: Okay.

DW: And Yulia became very close to Thoreau, the son of J.E.H. and ended up living out at Thornhill for 30 years in the house.

AH: Gosh.

DW: And she taught art for Canada.

AH: Yeah, at UCC, right?

DW: Yeah. And Alexandra, she was certified as an architect in Canada, one of the earliest women apparently to get that certification and then designed Warren Harris's house.

AH: Yeah.

DW: Yeah. I'm not sure exactly when this was painted, probably in the 1930s, maybe later. And then she taught at Upper Canada College, retired, and then, unfortunately, had a stroke apparently at her

- Actually, Phalene [phonetic] was there with her parents and her sisters. They were young, at her retirement dinner.

AH: Oh, no.

DW: For Canada College.

AH: Oh, that's horrible.

DW: Yeah. And she was disabled after that but continued. Thoreau basically nursed her until she died and continued to live in Thornhill. And she passed in 1972.

AH: Okay. It's interesting for me because I am only aware of what was in the uninvited exhibition, not in terms of seeing a landscape in person.

DW: She was mostly known for her portraits.

AH: Yeah, this is really neat to see. That sky is beautiful.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

AH: Is there anything?

DW: Yeah, this hangs in our living room.

AH: Does it?

DW: It's lovely to -

AH: I was just curious if there was anything there. And is it dated there possibly?

DW: That's -

AH: Forty -- Let me get a flashlight and see. Forty-one I want to say.

DW: Okay.

AH: Does that make sense?

DW: Yeah, it does. She would have completed this when they were living on 7th Street in that studio. Yeah.

AH: That's so cool. Yeah. Right in the thick of it will all that creativity around and it's so interesting. Beautiful. Maybe this is Algonquin. I'm not sure.

DW: Yeah, I'm not sure.

AH: Be curious if there's anything hiding on the back of the work behind that paper.

DW: That's a good question.

AH: It'd be fun to -- Well, if you're comfortable with it, I'd love to take the measurements and get back to you with an auction estimate for you and your wife just to think about for the future because it's really neat to see it. I'd love to share it with my colleagues if that's okay, too.

DW: Absolutely.

AH: Because for us, it's learning --

DW: Yeah. Sure.

AH: -- about an artist.

[Music]