

## History in the making: The Art Gallery of Hamilton celebrates Canadian Impressionist Helen McNicoll with remarkable exhibition

Rarely seen works to be featured in *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey*



Helen Galloway McNicoll, *On the Beach*, 1912, oil on canvas.  
Pierre LassondeCollection. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labri

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Hamilton, Ontario | Monday, February 3, 2025**

In 1925, the Art Association of Montreal held a memorial exhibition celebrating the life and work of Canadian painter Helen McNicoll. Featuring over 120 pieces, this major exhibition showcased the full breadth of her artistic practice. Now, a century later, the Art Gallery of Hamilton proudly presents [\*Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey\*](#), on view from February 15 to May 25, 2025.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS EXHIBITION HAS BEEN EXTENDED – IT NOW RUNS UNTIL AUGUST 31, 2025!**

This must-see exhibition is an opportunity for Ontario audiences to experience the most comprehensive solo exhibition of her work since 1925. More than 60 works are featured, many of which were recently rediscovered and presented for the first time in decades at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ). *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey* is unique in that nearly half of the works included are drawn from the Pierre Lassonde Private Collection. These works have not been widely showcased until this exhibition, which was originally created and organized by the MNBAQ, and is now presented and adapted by the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

*An Impressionist Journey* will feature McNicoll's *The Bean Harvest* – a work that was lost for more than 100 years before being rediscovered and featured on the BBC's *Fake or Fortune?* television program, where the painting's authenticity was confirmed. This will be the first time *The Bean Harvest* has been exhibited since 1913.

**"We are extremely excited to be opening *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey* at the AGH so our visitors can explore the life and work of this celebrated artist," says Shelley Falconer, President and CEO at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.**

**"Excitement in the community has been building as we approach the opening of this exhibition, which will prove to be an unforgettable experience for lovers of Helen McNicoll, Impressionism, and Canadian historical art."**



Helen Galloway McNicoll, *Sunny September*, 1913, oil on canvas.  
Pierre Lassonde Collection. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

Helen McNicoll is one of Canada's most significant historical artists. As an early adopter of Impressionism, she carved an individual and avant-garde path in Canada and abroad, making a name for herself on the world stage. McNicoll's art was widely celebrated during her lifetime. Critics praised the masterful treatment of light in her paintings and the immersive nature of her subjects, and she greatly increased the recognition of Québec and Canadian art on both sides of the Atlantic.

**"We invite you to immerse yourself in the spectacular work of Helen McNicoll with *An Impressionist Journey*," says Shelley Falconer. "It provides a rare opportunity to view such a large collection of her work in person – and many of the pieces have rarely been seen before. Thank you to our Presenting Sponsor, Cowley Abbott, for their generous support of this exhibition."**

Representing modernity through her Impressionist style and timeless subjects, McNicoll's paintings invite us to journey alongside the artist. This exhibition explores the outer worlds the artist recreated in pencil and paint throughout her life, as well as the inner worlds she navigated. Examining themes of female independence and fulfillment, personal and professional risk-taking, and friendship, *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey* gives us a glimpse of the world as Helen McNicoll saw it.

We invite the public to attend the [Winter Exhibitions Opening Celebration](#) on Sunday, February 23, 2025 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, where we'll be celebrating *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey*. Remarks will begin at 3:00 pm.



Helen Galloway McNicoll, *Garden*, 1913, oil on canvas.  
Pierre LassondeCollection. Photo: MNBAQ, Louis Hébert

### ***Her Too: Contemporaries of Helen McNicoll***

Organized as a companion to *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey*, this exhibition highlights the work of women artists who, like McNicoll, were at the forefront of Canadian art in the early 1900s. Drawn entirely from the Art Gallery of Hamilton's permanent collection, this selection highlights the work of some of Canada's most ambitious modern artists. Among the first generation of professionally-trained artists, they adopted modern styles of painting, bringing new artistic approaches to Canada, including Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.

*Her Too: Contemporaries of Helen McNicoll* includes works by Harriet Ford, Laura Muntz Lyall, Hannah Rusk Kelly, Florence Carlyle, and Florence McGillivray. They represent the first wave of women artists to travel abroad for study and exhibition and paved the way for future generations. Each of their journeys was as unique as their artistic practice. While all embraced international trends in their work, their paths differed. Some returned to establish careers in Canada, others taught the next generation of artists, and some remained largely abroad.

Notably, many of the artists featured have strong ties to Hamilton and the surrounding region, having been born, lived, or studied here. These include Otilie Palm Jost, Marion Mattice, Laura Muntz Lyall, Hortense Gordon, and Grace Coombs.

## Related Talks

*Curators Talk: Proof in the Painting*

[March 20, 2025](#) - 7:00 pm with Tobi Bruce

[April 3, 2025](#) - 7:00 pm with John Geoghegan

Tickets Required

Join us for two intriguing talks that delve into the world of art authentication and the very real detective work involved in finding long-lost artworks. Go behind the scenes and learn how curators research, find, and authenticate works of art. Our experts will guide you through real-life case studies, sharing stories of both triumphs and challenges in trying to uncover the truth behind artworks.

[\*Curator Talk: In Conversation with Caroline Shields and Julie Nash\*](#)

April 10, 2025

6:30 pm – 8:00 pm

Tickets Required

Join Caroline Shields and Julie Nash as they discuss the Impressionist work of Helen McNicoll.

Caroline Shields is Curator, European Art at the AGO, where she has curated the exhibitions *Impressionism in the Age of Industry: Monet, Pissarro and more* (2018), *Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic* (2022) and *Cassatt—McNicoll: Impressionists Between Worlds* (2023). She holds a Doctorate in Art History from the University of Maryland with a specialization in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century European art.

Julie Nash is a curator and art historian who worked at the National Gallery of Canada for many years. Julie played an integral interpretive role in the development of *Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey* with the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. In 2024, she was a program consultant for an episode of the BBC's 'Fake or Fortune?' dedicated to Helen McNicoll, which proved that a long-lost canvas had been rediscovered.

## Related Programs

[\*Drawn In: Gallery Sketching McNicoll\*](#)

March 1 - May 3, 2025

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Tickets Required

Artist/Instructor Amanda McKinney Sparrow will guide participants through key elements such as female figures, light and shadow, composition, and landscapes, offering insights into McNicoll's techniques and artistic vision. This class is suitable for all skill levels.

[Learning from the Masters: Helen McNicoll and Impressionism](#)

March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6

1:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Registration Required

In this hands-on course with artist/instructor Diana Gordon, students will learn to emulate the Impressionist style of Canadian artist Helen McNicoll. Starting with an analysis of her techniques, participants will practice key elements of her painting style through close-up studies using acrylics. This course is suitable for all skill levels.

**Media Preview**

By appointment, the AGH will hold media previews of the exhibition on Friday, February 14, 2025. Please contact Aaron Lam, Coordinator of Communications, at [alam@artgalleryofhamilton.com](mailto:alam@artgalleryofhamilton.com) to book your preview.

**Media Kit**

[Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey](#)



Helen Galloway McNicoll, *Picking Berries*, 1913, oil on canvas.  
Pierre Lassonde Collection. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

(continued on next page)

## Acknowledgements

*Helen McNicoll: An Impressionist Journey* was created and organized by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec and adapted by the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



The exhibition at the AGH is presented by Cowley Abbott, Canada's Art Auctioneers.



We also acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Hamilton.



Conseil des arts  
du Canada

Canada Council  
for the Arts



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Ontario



..... end .....

## About Helen McNicoll

Helen McNicoll was born in Toronto in 1879 and grew up in Montreal. Scarlet fever rendered her deaf when she was two years old and her parents encouraged her to develop her artistic and musical creativity. She began her artistic training in the late 1890s with William Brymner at the Art Association of Montreal, then moved to England on his advice. She settled in London in 1902 and took courses at the Slade School of Fine Art. McNicoll began to exhibit her work at the Art Association in 1906 and received the first Jessie Dow Prize there in 1908. Elected to the Royal Society of British Artists in 1913, then to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1914, McNicoll died in 1915 at the age of 35 following complications from diabetes.

## **About the Art Gallery of Hamilton**

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is the oldest and largest public art gallery in southwestern Ontario. Its permanent collection, which is focused on historical Canadian, International, and Contemporary art, numbers more than 11,000 works and is recognized as one of Canada's finest. The AGH is a vital creative hub and centre of lifelong learning that enables people of all ages to enrich their lives by gaining a deeper understanding of art.

### **For more information, interview requests and images please contact:**

Aaron Lam, Coordinator of Communications

Art Gallery of Hamilton

905.527.6610, ext. 247

[alam@artgalleryofhamilton.com](mailto:alam@artgalleryofhamilton.com)