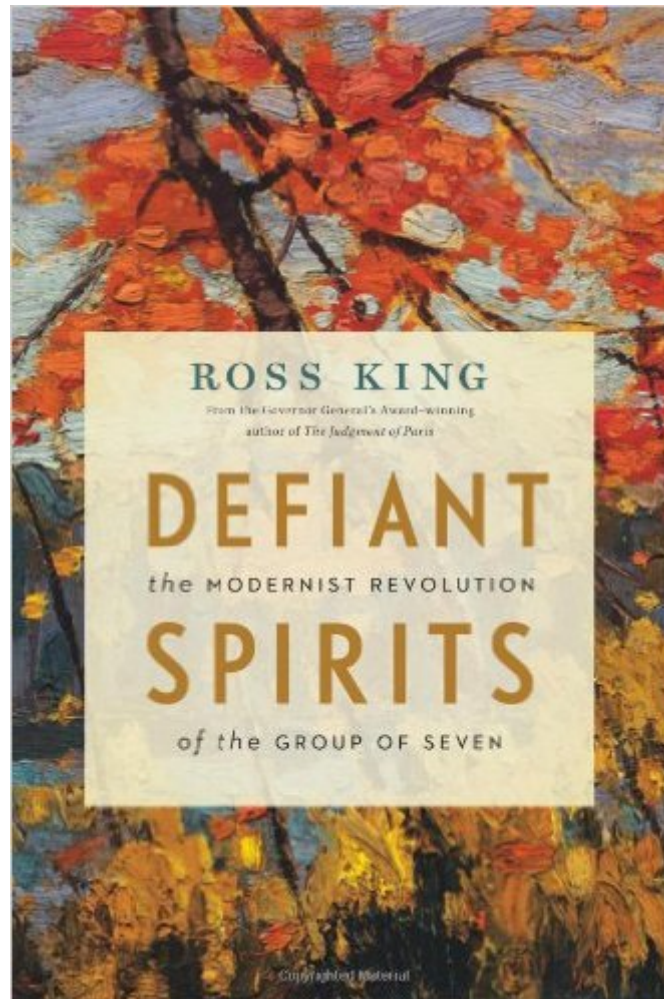


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# Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution Of The Group Of Seven



## Synopsis

Beginning in 1912, *Defiant Spirits* traces the artistic development of Tom Thomson and the future members of the Group of Seven, Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Franz Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley, over a dozen years in Canadian history. Working in an eclectic and sometimes controversial blend of modernist styles, they produced what an English critic celebrated in the 1920s as the "most vital group of paintings of the 20th century." Inspired by Cézanne, Van Gogh and other modernist artists, they tried to interpret the Ontario landscape in light of the strategies of the international avant-garde. Based after 1914 in the purpose-built Studio Building for Canadian Art, the young artists embarked on what Lawren Harris called "an all-engrossing adventure": travelling north into the Canadian Shield and forging a style of painting appropriate to what they regarded as the unique features of Canada's northern landscape. Sumptuously illustrated, rigorously researched and drawn from archival documents and letters, *Defiant Spirits* constitutes a "group biography," reconstructing the men's aspirations, frustrations and achievements. It details not only the lives of Tom Thomson and the members of the Group of Seven but also the political and social history of Canada during a time when art exhibitions were venues for debates about Canadian national identity and cultural worth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ross King's well-received "The Judgment of Paris" convinced me that his 2010 book on Canada's

"Group of Seven" would be informative and enlightening. I was right. King, apparently Canadian, details the emergence of the group pre-World War One, its struggle for recognition in a Canada, dominated by English art criticism and sensibilities, in an art world hostile to Canadian nationalism, and, finally post War, its acceptance in Canada as an artistic group worthy of museum wall space. The first part of the book deals primarily with Tom Thomson, his eccentric spirit, individuality, devotion to the backwoods, his extraordinary painting achievements and his untimely death by drowning in 1917. Though not the group's leader, the generous and supportive Lawren Harris, an artist of extraordinary scope and development, occupied that spot, Thomson's artistic force was - indeed - the group's focal point before and after his death. King adeptly juggles the separate lives of each of the seven actual members (J.E.H. MacDonald, F. H. Varley, Frank Johnston, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Frank Carmichael) and his thirty six (36) exquisite color plates acquaints the reader to the art of each. The group was intrinsically tied to the War and its aftermath; as King writes "they wanted to prove to the wider world; not merely Canadians, that Canadian art was modern, vital and unique - that Canada . . . could produce artists as well as soldiers." This review coincides with the closing of an exhibition of the Group of Seven called "Painting Canada" at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection near Toronto. I look forward to buying the book "Painting Canada" as soon as it is sold.

This review is for the kindle version. This format does not have any illustrations of the works discussed, no pictures at all! This is most unusual for an ART book and the reason for the lower rating. The text generally is well written, although I found the author likes to use, here in this particular book, multi-syllabic, obscure words that had me frequently accessing a dictionary. This was frustrating because I have enjoyed the author's previous books (hard copy) and found them informative, insightful and enjoyable. Most of the detail of the text is in the pre-first show, pre-1920 period. After that the information becomes sketchier. Perhaps he didn't consider the artists defiant anymore. Admittedly, including this later period and following up on their lives and art from the 1930s on would have made the book much longer. Perhaps a sequel volume would work. I did enjoy his documentation of the artists' formative years in Europe and during World War 1. His analysis of social and political cultures of the time were most enlightening and much needed as context..

Loved reading this book. It took an excellent viewpoint, the Groups modernism and what they were trying to accomplish with their work and their writings.

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