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Those Who Point the Way

Marilyn L. Grady

Emily Carr (1871–1945) is described as one of British Columbia's most renowned artists. I became aware of her work on a recent visit to Vancouver. Her paintings are a main feature of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

In reading the description of her work and a bit of her biography, I was struck by her accomplishments, her stature as an artist and a writer, and her career path. She was a painter for many years and received no support or encouragement for her painting. At the age of 42, she apparently abandoned painting and turned instead to a variety of jobs to earn a living. After a 15 year hiatus, she was invited to exhibit some of her work. Only when her work was recognized by the Group of Seven did she receive any encouragement for her artistic endeavors.

She is noted for her individual style. The themes of her paintings are (a) the natural settings of British Columbia, such as the rainforest and (b) the symbols, culture, and imagery of the First Nations people, such as totem poles and the raven. Her style is certainly distinctive. Carr's trees, skies, and landscapes are memorable.

The influence of the Group of Seven, all landscape painters, is a particularly important part of her story. These men saw her work, recognized her talent, and moved her along in her career.

How many women have been recognized for their work and talent and moved along in their careers by their own Groups of Seven? It may be worthwhile for each of us to consider those who have pointed the way in our careers. These individuals need to be recognized for their agency in our career progression. The roles we play in each other's successes and accomplishments are often invisible.