REID, Leslie (b. Ottawa, Ontario, 1947 / née en Ottawa (Ontario) en 1947)

Leslie Reid is an established Canadian painter based in Ottawa, Ontario. She is Professor Emeritus in the Visual Arts Department at the University of Ottawa following her retirement as a Full Professor in the Department in 2009. In 1976, her work was included in the landmark exhibition Some Canadian Women Artists at the National Gallery of Canada and the Gallery has been collecting Reid’s paintings since that time. Her work has been collected by numerous other institutions in Canada and the United States including the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Whyte Museum, Banff, and the Richard L. Nelson Gallery, University of California, Davis. Over the course of her career Reid’s work has been regularly featured in Canadian and international solo and group exhibitions. Her painting was most recently the focus of a retrospective exhibition at the Carleton University Art Gallery (CUAG), Ottawa, titled A Darkening Vision: Paintings by Leslie Reid curated by Diana Nemiroff. In 2000 she was awarded the Jury Prize for Excellence in Visual Arts, Royal Canadian Academy, Canada. In addition to her paintings, Reid is also known for her printmaking – the medium she studied at the Slade School of Art, University of London, in 1977 and at the Chelsea School of Art, London, where she graduated with a Higher Diploma in Art in 1971.

In 1975 the National Gallery of Canada made a significant commitment to the work of Leslie Reid through the acquisition of a series of four large seemingly monochromatic greyish-white canvases titled Calumet Island 6 a.m. / Calumet Island 10 a.m. / Calumet Island 2 p.m. / Calumet Island 6 p.m. (1974). What read on first glance as pure abstractions reveal themselves over the course of viewing – and through the hint of their titles – as containing a representational subject: the recorded painterly views of a landscape looking onto Calumet Island, located on the Ottawa River near Cantley, QC. The reference to time in the 1974 Calumet Island paintings provides raw data of the registered hour of day of her source photographs. However it also points to a personal connection to the subject that is both the record of an individual visual experience of a landscape as well as an emotional one. Reid spent many years of her childhood in this region of Quebec where her mother’s family had property. As Reid suggested around the time she created her first Calumet Island paintings: “Landscape is a concern that modern painting should not now have to justify, but questions surrounding it remain unanswered, partly because unmasked and partly because of the uncertainty of how, critically, to ask them.”

Focusing on the visual effects of light and atmosphere, the Calumet Island paintings introduced Reid’s œuvre as at once delivering luminous, lyrical and nuanced views of nature while at the same time engaged in analytical questions regarding Modernist, abstract and landscape painting traditions.
Cape Pine: The Road (2011) and Cape Pine: The Cairn (2011) are two very recent paintings by the artist completed just prior to her retrospective exhibition at the Carleton University Art Gallery (CUAG) in 2011. These two large-scale oil on canvas productions are strong examples of the ways in which Reid continues in interesting and provocative ways to explore the latent ambiguities within landscape painting some three and a half decades since the Gallery’s first acquisition of her work. There is more than a nod in Reid’s Cape Pine paintings to the monochromatic visual tendencies reminiscent in her more abstract Calumet Island works. What Reid has recorded in these most recent works are two coastal scenes from a trip she made in 2011 to the small village of Cape Pine, Newfoundland, on the southernmost tip of the Avalon Peninsula. Cape Pine: The Cairn looks toward a bluff by the sea on which sits a monument of piled rocks, and Cape Pine: The Road draws the viewer inland through the trace of a country road that in the painting diminishes into the distance. As the titles for these works suggest, both the cairn situated to the left of Cape Pine: The Cairn about mid-way up the canvas, as well as the road centrally positioned between two faintly treated patches of land in Cape Pine: The Road are given as focal points for the viewer in the respective canvases. The paintings themselves are coloured with different shades of grey; a subdued smoky sky occupies just over half the area of each work, with delicately depicted part-rock, part-grass landscape occupying the foreground which Reid has rendered on the canvas through short exchanges of horizontal brush strokes.

There is a somewhat foreboding psychological undertone to Reid’s Cape Pine paintings which are arguably more bleak and austere than previous works. A viewer of these paintings is literally “led into the fog” where both the road and the cairn become stabilizing but insecure markers that eventually give way to the disorientation of the murky mist engulfing the overall scenes of earth, sea and sky. What the artist has attempted to capture in these canvases is a sense of her own disorientation within the inhospitable fog she faced for the complete duration of her time in this region of Newfoundland. This atmospheric isolation was coupled in Reid’s case with the specter of a tragic family history – a father and brothers lost to the sea during a storm – she went to Cape Pine to research. In her introductory panel for the exhibition A Darkening Vision at CUAG, Diana Nemiroff described in more depth the psychological aspects inherent to the painter’s work: “For Leslie Reid, the sensory experience of the landscape is deeply imbued with feeling...her intention has never been photographic objectivity but rather to communicate the perceptual and psychological sensations provoked by the experience of a particular place.” This description aptly applies to the Cape Pine paintings as it does to Reid’s Calumet Island paintings and throughout her cast corpus of work. The aesthetic reference here is unmistakably to Reid’s earliest paintings from the 1970s and in this sense both Cape Pine: The Road and Cape Pine: The Cairn bring insightful circularity to the artist’s chronology to date. While the new works neither begin nor end at abstraction, they also do not skirt the issue. Rather, they exemplify the mature reflections of an artist confident in reconciling subjective nuances of history, place and personal experience within the painterly genres that have long been the subject of her fascination and critique.

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1 Leslie Reid, as quoted in David Burnett, *Artscanada*, Winter 1975-76, p. 58.
2 Reid chose to visit this area of Newfoundland to research a story about a family of fishermen lost to the sea during a storm. More details of this inspiration for the painting will be recorded from the artist and added to the curatorial files for these paintings.