

EQUINOX GALLERY  
3642 Commercial Street  
Vancouver, BC V5N 4G2

604.736.2405 t  
info@equinoxgallery.com e  
www.equinoxgallery.com w

## **Gordon Smith: A Painter's Legacy**

September 10 to October 15, 2022

Opening Reception: Saturday September 10th, 2 to 4pm

Equinox Gallery, Vancouver

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Equinox Gallery is pleased to present *A Painter's Legacy*, an exhibition of works by the late Canadian artist Gordon Smith (b. 1919, d. 2020). A brilliant painter with an international following, Smith's style evolved over a lifetime as he made increasingly complex and layered, dense paintings. A prominent figure in a generation of notable West Coast painters, architects, poets, musicians and writers, Smith had an openly inquisitive mind and experimented endlessly in his art making. The unique presence of nature on the Pacific coast was a boundless inspiration to the artist. From the rich forest that surrounded his home and studio in West Vancouver to the shorelines he encountered on trips up and down the coast, Smith produced a vast body of work that alternated between representation and abstraction. It was not the grand vistas nor the broad expanses of nature that attracted Smith, he was drawn to the web of trees, the entanglement of undergrowth, the reflection of a swamp, the snowfall on a branch—the intricacies of how nature functions cyclically and seasonally, through spring, fall and winter.

Through stunning examples, *A Painter's Legacy* is an opportunity to assess Smith's important series and enduring subjects as well as his highly sophisticated mark making techniques. Writer and critic Robert Enright explains, "The more you look at its compositional idiosyncrasies and the more you anticipate a pleasing symmetry, the more persuasive is the realization of how Smith has drawn you into nature's beautiful confusions." It is these "beautiful confusions" that echo throughout this selection of works, where opposing qualities of darkness/light and density/fragility are skillfully woven together in paint.

Gordon Smith was born in East Brighton, England in 1919 and immigrated to Winnipeg in 1933. He began work as a paperboy and secured a part-time position at Brigdens Department Store as an illustrator for menswear catalogues. Encouraged by his employer, he enrolled at the Winnipeg School of Art where he studied under L.L. Fitzgerald and had his first professional exhibition in 1938. The following year, Smith took a Greyhound bus from Winnipeg to San Francisco to see the Golden Gate International Exposition where he was exposed to the work of European modernists for the first time. For Smith during this time, "an entirely new world of art was opening up."

Smith burst upon the national art scene in 1955, when his canvas, *Structure with Red Sun* won first prize in the First Biennial of Canadian Painting at the National Gallery of Canada. In 1960 he received a fellowship from the Canada Council and took a year to travel to New York and throughout Europe using Ernst Gombrich's *The Story of Art* as his travel guide. Smith would continue to travel to see great art throughout his life, including several trips to Haida Gwaii which informed his work greatly.

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Smith's distinguished exhibition career of eighty years included two major retrospectives at the Vancouver Art Gallery, over 25 solo exhibitions at Equinox Gallery, participation in biennial exhibitions in Canada and Brazil, as well as significant commissions including the design of the Canadian Pavilion for Expo '70 in Osaka (in collaboration with Arthur Erickson) and major works for public buildings in Washington, DC and London, UK. Smith continued to exhibit new work until 2018. Gordon Smith's many major awards include the Order of Canada (1996), the Order of British Columbia (2000), the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2009) and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts (2007). In 1976 he was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. Smith was the recipient of several honorary degrees, including Honorary Doctorates from Emily Carr University of Art + Design, University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. Works by Smith are found in many museum collections worldwide including Vancouver Art Gallery, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, among many others.

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**Gordon Smith: A Painter's Legacy** opens on Saturday September 10th, 2022 at Equinox Gallery at 3642 Commercial Street in Vancouver. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10AM to 5PM.