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## HELEN MCNICOLL

UN VOYAGE IMPRESSIONNISTE | AN IMPRESSIONIST JOURNEY

*Edited by Anne-Marie Bouchard*

### A bold artist who challenged the conventions of her period

This book accompanies the exhibition entitled **“Helen McNicoll. An Impressionist Journey”** at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, which is dedicated to this extraordinary Canadian artist (1879-1915).

At a time when women were often relegated to the domestic sphere, Helen McNicoll stood out for her free spirit and her passion for travel. Painting “en plein air” became her preferred method, enabling her to capture the light and atmosphere of the places she explored. Her favourite subjects were scenes of everyday life, often with an emphasis on women’s work, which gave her a unique perspective compared with the mostly male Impressionists of the time.

The exhibition displays over 60 works by McNicoll from various collections, including 25 from the Pierre Lassonde Collection. The catalogue takes its cue from the works on display to explore themes such as female independence, courage, friendship and freedom, placing them in the context of the suffragette movement in England.

The book offers an invaluable opportunity to rediscover an artist who challenged the conventions of her time and left an indelible mark on the Canadian art scene.

**Helen McNicoll** was born in Toronto in 1879 and raised in Montreal. She lost her hearing after contracting scarlet fever at the age of two. Despite this disability, her parents encouraged her to cultivate her artistic and musical talents. She trained initially at the Art Association in Montreal and later moved to London, where she attended the Slade School of Fine Art, an institution renowned for its innovative approach and commitment to gender equality. Trips to Europe were fundamental to her artistic development, giving her direct experience of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. She later regularly exhibited her work at the Art Association, winning the first Jessie Dow Prize in 1908. Although her works were praised by critics, she long languished in the shadow of other Canadian Impressionists. Helen McNicoll died in 1915 at only 35 years of age as a result of complications from diabetes. Ten years later, the Art Association held her first major retrospective exhibition.

[Exhibition: Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, June 20, 2024 – January 5, 2025](#)