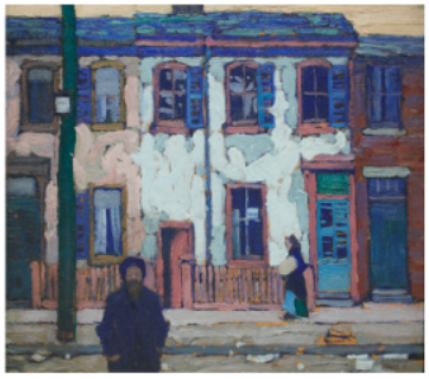
ART MATTERS BLOG

# An interview with Toronto artist Anique Jordan: Lawren Harris, Toronto and a complicated history

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**Posted in:**

Lawren Harris







When you think of Lawren Harris, do you imagine snow-capped mountains and ice-blue sky? While he is best known for these iconic images that have become an accepted part of our Canadian identity, Harris spent his formative years in Toronto, often painting a complex and culturally diverse neighbourhood called the Ward. Come experience these remarkable Toronto works for the first time (or again), along with his best northern landscapes, in *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris*, on until September 18. See Toronto's early days from Harris' perspective, along with archival photos and maps of the Ward and a response to those images from contemporary Canadian artists.

We asked Anique Jordan, a Toronto artist who created two extraordinary works for the exhibition, to share her thoughts about Lawren Harris' complicated legacy and how her work is focused on creating a more inclusive Canadian history.



**AGO: What about Lawren Harris' work interests you?**

**AJ:** My interest in Lawren Harris began as an interest in Canadian and Torontonian archives, specifically in the stories that are absent from them. I wanted to uncover what the invisible parts of Toronto's history – its people, its architecture, its spirit– look like. A lot of work that I do looks at the spiritual aspect of Lawren Harris' work and also looks at some of the things that are missing from his work.

**AGO: What were some of your observations?**

**AJ:** His work made me think about some of the ideals
of Canadian art history and what it means when we remove images of people from landscapes and from spaces. For me, Harris' paintings from the ward and his northern landscapes are an entry point into questioning: who has the power to construct these official "histories"? And what are the implications of omitting, erasing or making invisible particular versions of history? What if Canadian history and art history could offer a nuanced, complex memory of people, places and moments?

**AGO: What was most surprising when you first came across his work depicting the Ward?**

**AJ:** I was most surprised by how much of this densely populated, immigrant community laid buried under Toronto, and until recently, was hardly mentioned. One of my works in the exhibition is a re-creation of the Black British Methodist Episcopal church that existed in Toronto in the early 1900s in the ward. Using a church congregation, I re-enacted a Black Victorian mourning scene with intentions to not only think about the fact that Black Canadian histories and Black histories in general are constantly omitted from the archives, but also with the intention to honour surrealism, sacredness and ritual. While these images are inspired by the past, they also free us to imagine the possibilities for a different present and future.



**AGO: Lawren Harris painted Toronto at a particular time in our history. How does his work – and your work – help us better realize Toronto's history and how can it help us understand our present/future?**

**AJ:** We would have lost something important if we didn't consider the role this work has in questioning and shaping a type of future we might not have once been able to imagine. We hold a responsibility to include these stories, without simplifying them, into the dominant narratives of our city's building.

To find out more about Anique Jordan, please visit www.aniquejjordan.com

Come and see for yourself! Book your tickets today and share your thoughts online using #HarrisAGO.

IMAGE CREDITS: [1] Lawren S. Harris, *The Corner Store* 1912 oil on canvas. Bequest of Mary Gordon Nesbitt, Toronto, 1992 92/113 © 2016 The Family of Lawren S. Harris [2] Arthur Goss, Printed by Jeremy Taylor *Health Department. Rear Yard, 512 Front Street East* August 27, 1914; printed 1998 gelatin silver print Purchase, 1998 © 2016 Art Gallery of Ontario [3] Lawren S. Harris, *In the Ward* c. 1920 oil on board. On loan from a private collection © 2016 The Family of Lawren S. Harris [4] Karimah Gheddai, 2016 [5] Anique Jordan, *Mas' at 94 Chestnut* 2016 digital C-print mounted on di-bond. © 2016 Anique Jordan