

**Sale Name:** Fine Art Auction Featuring Canadian & Inuit Artworks

**LOT 33 - William Roberts - June Wheat**



**Artist Description** William Griffith Roberts (1921 – 2001 CAD) R.C.A., O.S.A., C.S.P.W.C. Born in Nelson, B.C., he received his early education there and entered the Vancouver School of Art where he studied for six months. Throughout his early years he had been interested in cartoons much inspired by the creators of “Maggie and Jiggs”, “The Captain and the Kids”, “Happy Hooligan” and “Little Orphan Annie”. He sold his cartoons to local papers in the Vancouver area. He enlisted in the R.C.A.F. and served overseas as an Air Gunner and still contributed cartoons to the Vancouver Sun and the Airforce paper Wings Abroad (1941-45). It was during his service overseas that he first saw English water colours and in his spare time he continued to paint and improve his technique. Following the war, he worked briefly for the Vancouver Sun as an editorial cartoonist but politics was not a burning interest with him and he did not share the same views with the publisher. He moved to Toronto in search of opportunities and enrolled in the Ontario College of Art but found classes crowded and instructors on short supply. He left the College to make his own way. During those early years he did every conceivable job – washing cars, washing dishes, etc., in his struggle just to make ends meet. He kept working at his art and his cartoons, establishing himself in the field of commercial art. In his painting he experienced his first success in 1950 with the sale of “Banks’ Lunch”, a water-colour exhibited at the Ontario Society of Artists annual show and sold on opening night. By now he was married with a family. In 1952 he took his family on an extended trip to England where he toured the coastlines painting in water colours then went on to France and northern Spain. After a year abroad Roberts and his family returned to Toronto where he resumed his art career. He was elected member of The Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour in 1954; member of the O.S.A. in 1956; A.R.C.A in 1957. Exhibiting with these societies gave him access to a larger audience. By now he had gained considerable experience as a painter and joined the staff of the Ontario College of Art where he continued to teach for the next nine years (1957-66). During that period he was for a year Resident Artist at the University of Western Ontario (1963-64) with his studio on the lower floor of the McIntosh Memorial Art Gallery. At the end of his term he had completed 20 major paintings, 100 water colours, nine tempera paintings and numerous drawings. He was now living in a 105-year-old house in the little town of

Milton, 40 miles west of Toronto with his wife and two daughters. In cold weather he still went out to paint his subjects. By mixing alcohol with his water colours he kept his paints from freezing. Returning to his studio he then tacked each painting up on his studio wall to give it "the test of time". He destroys up to 75% of his production in the process of keeping the best. His oil paintings are done either from memory or from meticulous ink sketches. Writing in the Owen Sound Sun Times in 1971, Ann Kelly described the artist as follows, "If his paintings reflect his personality William Roberts is an extremely practical and resourceful man, capitalizing on every opportunity. His subjects include many of the simple things in life, a church window, a dried and wrinkled baby's boot, a weather vane, a barn, even a progressive series of paintings of an apple. His work also shows imagination. One painting is of the back face of an antique clock, as though the clock were looking out at the world. Some of his pictures are haunting, almost reflecting an inner loneliness; others are purposefully stark. His work shows great perception of the interest in detail, be it the fine hairs on a rabbit or the painting of a beautiful old home near Streetsville done purely to emphasize the handmade Flemish bond brick. He did a series of paintings from letters he found in an old house, has utilized post cards, even an aging ear of corn. By poking into deserted houses and old barns, always with the permission of the owners, he has uncovered a wealth of subject matter. At one time he traded an old man a pair of binoculars to gain possession of a weather vane he desperately wanted to paint." Writing on the artist in 1978 for The Free Press (Lond., Ont.), Susanne Tausig noted, "William Roberts' watercolors are unfinished yet strangely complete; delicate yet strangely solid; opaque yet strangely dense; pale yet strangely intense; unpretentious yet strangely refined; austere yet strangely inviting. The contradictions can go on and on. It is exactly this kind of ambiguity which makes Roberts' work so intriguing. . . . The artist's most recent paintings stem from a summer spent in Nova Scotia. Previously, he was known for his interest in rural Ontario buildings such as farm houses and barns. And, even the vast blue expanse of the Atlantic Ocean at his fingertips, his subjects are mostly structural ones, such as the houses and lonely lighthouses that dot the coastline. Canada's east coast is an ideal subject for Roberts' work and, since the artist visited during the summer months, there is the added attraction of playful sunlight. Shadows form by the movement of the sun, and direct light rays that seem to bleach the wooden frames of the houses, add to the translucent quality. Included also in the show are some still life works, painted with the same fragile-forcefulness that is present in the landscapes. In these too, the artist shows remarkable restraint preferring to hint at color and contour rather than define it through splashy bold lines." His solo shows include: Roberts Gallery, Tor., biannually (1958-72); Art Gallery of Brantford (1970); Upper Street Gallery, Lond., Eng. (1973); Thielsen Gallery, Lond., Ont. (1974) (1978) (1980) (1981); Nancy Poole's Studio, Tor., annually (1974-83); Far Gallery, NYC, USA (1975) (1980); Equinox Gallery, Van., B.C. (1975) (1977) (1981) (1985) (1987); Zwickers Gallery, Hal., N.S. (1984); Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ont. (1987). His awards include: Canada Council Senior Arts Grant (1967); Canada Council Short Term Grants (1973) (1975) (1977) (1979); Ontario Arts Council Grant (1975); Winnipeg Prize; Monsanto Honor; Forester Award (O.S.A.) and an award from the C.S.P.W. He is represented in the following collections: Simon Fraser University, B.C.; Law Society of British Columbia; Saskatoon Art Gallery; Winnipeg Art Gallery; McIntosh Gallery, Univ. Western Ontario, Lond., Ont.; London Regional Art Gallery, Lond., Ont.; Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford, Ont.; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ont.; Imperial Oil, Ltd., Tor. Ont.; Royal Bank of Canada, Tor.; Reed Paper Company; Hart House, Univ. Tor.; City of Toronto Archives; Canada Permanent Company; Art Gallery of Ontario, Tor.; Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery, Owen Sound, Ont.; Scott Paper Company; Rothman's of Canada; Dow Chemical Company of Canada; National Gallery of Canada, Ott.; Canada Council Art Bank, Ott.; Dept. External Affairs (Can. Embassy, Athens); Memorial Univ. St. John's, Nfld.; National Bank of North Carolina; Alleghany

Airlines; Hall Gallery, Fort Worth, Texas; International Telephone and Telegraph and others. Up to 1986 he lived with his wife in a log house at Ayton, Ontario, before moving to St. Mary's Bay, N.S., where he paints a whole range of new subjects. The Roberts have two daughters who live in Nova Scotia. Source: Colin S. MacDonald A Dictionary of Canadian Artists

## Description

*Ink Drawing*

Signed & Titled Lower Center

Size - 12 ins x 20 ins (30.48cm x 50.8 cm)

Provenance:

Private Collection

**Quantity: 1**



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