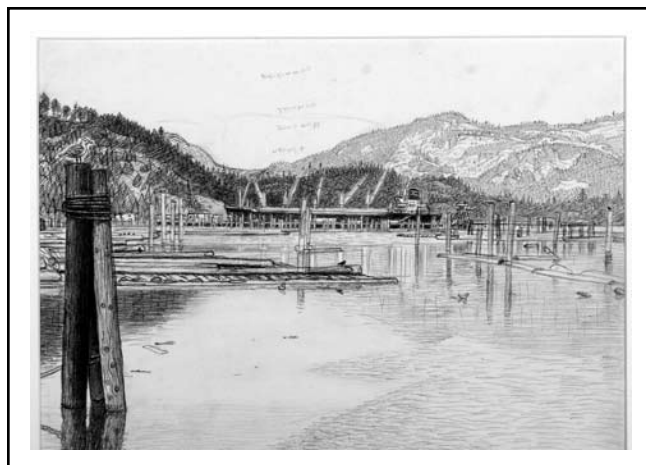


E.J. Hughes  
HIGH TIDE AT COWICHAN BAY

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E.J. Hughes  
BY MARGOT LEIGH BUTLER



**E.J. Hughes**  
By Margot Leigh Butler, 2005

Many of us take and keep photographs of places we've visited, yet fewer of us draw and paint them.

*High Tide at Cowichan Bay* (1970) is a drawing made in preparation for a painting by the British Columbian landscape artist E. J. Hughes. It's one of many pencil sketches Hughes made on site and 'from nature'. The artist says "I've found from years of trial that the only way I can work is to make sketches in pencil from Nature, purely as reference material for future use in the studio."<sup>1</sup> The sketch includes notes on shapes and colours in the landscape, plus figures: "The small figures that appear in my paintings are there only

E.J. Hughes  
*High Tide at Cowichan Bay*, 1990

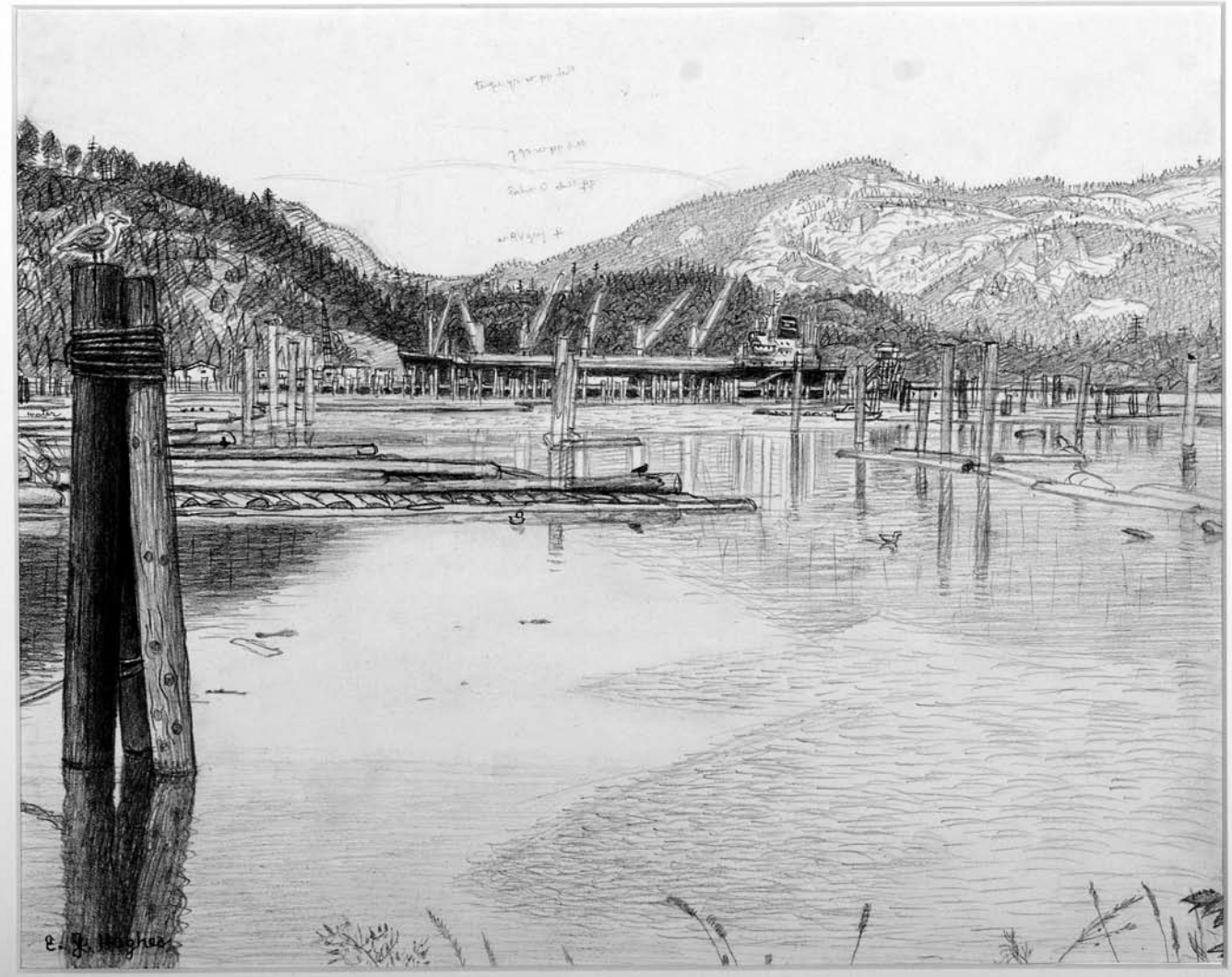
graphite pencil drawing on paper  
(28.4 x 36 cm image)  
SAG 1990.09.01  
Gift of the Surrey Art Gallery Association  
with financial assistance from Imperial Oil  
in memory of Jane Young

Photograph by Cameron Heryet

because they were there when I was working from nature on my preliminary sketches with pencil.”

It might seem that Hughes’ faithful inclusion of all he saw pertains more to photography than to painting. In fact, landscape photography and landscape painting are inter-relating art movements which have been in conversation since photography’s invention in the 1820s. Reflecting on the influence of photography on painting, Hughes says “It is definitely mostly due to the invention of the camera that all this design and emphasized paint quality have come into painting.”

Both concerned with representing the real world, painting and photography go about it in different ways, with different histories, and sometimes with more than a bit of competition. Hughes has stated that “My goal is to make all my paintings clear and realistic, even more understandable than a photograph” and further that “I was just... interested in depicting this beautiful landscape... the most beautiful landscape in the world and that shouldn’t be left to a camera alone.”



E.J. Hughes *High Tide at Cowichan Bay*, 1990 graphite pencil drawing on paper (28.4 x 36 cm image) SAG 1990.09.01  
Gift of the Surrey Art Gallery Association with financial assistance from Imperial Oil in memory of Jane Young. Photograph by Cameron Heryet.

E.J. Hughes was born in 1913 in North Vancouver and lives on Vancouver Island. Of his work as a local landscape painter of national and international significance, Vancouver Art Gallery curator and E.J. Hughes scholar Ian M. Thom has stated "... E.J. Hughes, [is] an artist who is, like Emily Carr, profoundly connected to the landscape of British Columbia. His work is about the human presence in that landscape, but it is, more importantly, about that landscape as a locus of identity. This sense of identity and the search for our place within larger landscapes - social, cultural, and political - are the ongoing task of the artist."<sup>2</sup>

An early student of members of the most famous of all Canadian art movements - "The Group of Seven" (J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Franklin Carmichael, F.H. Varley and Frank Johnston) - Hughes was part of "The Group of Seven" second generation. He studied under Jock Macdonald, Frederick Varley and Charles H. Scott at the Vancouver School of Applied Art and Design, graduating in 1933; in 1939 he joined the military and became an official war artist, later returning to Vancouver Island.

The content of his work features many symbols of life on the West Coast: coves and fishing villages,

farm houses, arbutus trees, boats and coastal mountains. Representing land, sea and glimpses of daily life with clarity and vividness, Hughes work has a recognizable style. Referred to as a stylized 'realism', Hughes employs flattened space, skewed perspective and simplified shapes. Commenting on his 'realism', Hughes states: "It feels much better to me to think that an artist is working to show his appreciation of what already has been created than creating things himself."

Many of us take and keep photographs of places we've visited, and some of us draw and paint them.

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#### Footnotes:

- 1 All quotes by E. J. Hughes are from [http://www.painterskeys.com/auth\\_search.asp?name=E.%20J.%20Hughes](http://www.painterskeys.com/auth_search.asp?name=E.%20J.%20Hughes)
- 2 Ian M. Thom *Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia*, Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 2000, page 16.

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