

Reframing Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven in the Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario: From Principles to Practice

GREGORY HUMENIUK

The Thomson Collection of Canadian Art, European Art, and Ship Models developed for more than fifty years before its arrival at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Ken Thomson's early acquisitions foreshadowed interests, not the intensity, that marked the collecting in his final decades.¹

His first acquisition of a work by Tom Thomson (1877–1917) and the Group of Seven (Thomson and the Group), J.E.H. MacDonald's (1873–1932) oil sketch *Algoma*, was made almost twenty years after he began collecting in the early 1950s.² His interest in these artists deepened to the extent that he acquired their work with increasing focus and determination; by 2008 more than half of the nearly 600 paintings in the Thomson Collection of Canadian Art (Thomson Collection) were by Thomson and the Group.³

When the Art Gallery of Ontario reopened to the public on 14 November 2008, after the completion of its project of expansion and renovation, Transformation AGO, more than two-thirds of the nearly 650 Canadian paintings and works on paper in the Thomson Collection, and all but seven of the more than 250 paintings by Thomson and the Group, had been reframed expressly for their installation at the AGO. The reframing of a gift of this size was unprecedented in Canada. Unlike other gifts from single collectors that indelibly altered their new homes, the Thomson Collection was to be installed in purpose-built galleries that would inform their presentation.⁴ By 2008 this collection of historical paintings had witnessed multiple transformations in framing styles, museological attitudes, and art historical reception en route to its integration in a large public museum. None of the published reactions to Transformation AGO observed that this preeminent collection of Thomson and the Group was largely reframed in off-white frames unlike any the artists selected for their works.⁵ This silence contrasts with the discussion of William Rubin's reframing of the collection of modern painting at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) done for its Cesar Pelli & Associates expansion (1984) that was published locally and nationally, as well as in subsequent literature on the history of framing.⁶ At the Baltimore Museum of Art, Brenda Richardson's 1986 reframing of paintings by Henri Matisse in the Cone Collection was the subject of lively local discussion, the likes of which was neither initiated nor imitated in Toronto.⁷

To redress this omission, it will be argued that the success of the development of new frames for Thomson and the Group in the Thomson Collection is due to the frames' neutrality which baffles the paradigm of framing.⁸

The reframing of the majority of the Thomson Collection's paintings extends the practice of standardized gallery frames begun in the seventeenth-century. Unlike the earlier examples that were concerned with demonstrating ownership and contributing to unified programs of interior decor, this reframing project serves the art and viewer by concentrating on the viewer's encounter with the paintings.⁹

In January 2004, a little over a year after Ken Thomson (1923–2006) pledged his collection to the AGO, Gehry International Architects Inc., debuted their schematic design showing the Thomson Collection of Canadian Art occupying their renovation of spaces designed by Barton Myers Associates for the AGO's Stage III expansion (1993).¹⁰ Early renderings of the gallery now called "Cornelius Krieghoff: Images of Canada" showed saturated wall colours and free-standing double-sided vitrines to be used for small unframed paintings by Krieghoff (1815–1872), and elsewhere for unframed Thomson and Group oil sketches. The vitrines were to sit in the middle of galleries, with works in two rows on each side, obviating the proliferation of small works on walls, while altering circulation and impeding views across galleries. They were a design-based solution to an organizational problem requiring a radical solution. By 2005, the architectural program was set: the AGO, Gehry, and Thomson continued discussions of the finer points of design; the AGO and Thomson refined the curatorial programme; and reframing remained out of scope.

Curatorial planning embraced the collection's physiognomy, leading to seventeen monographic spaces out of twenty-five in its suite of galleries.¹¹ Throughout, the installations foster deep engagement with artists and art, allowing visitors to take the measure of an artist's achievement in coherent groupings, and contrasts with the late 1990s and early 2000s trends of thematic installations and contextualisation with material culture.¹² As emphasis on experience or interpretation varies with personalities and perspectives, James Johnson Sweeney's curatorial principles at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1954 were as valid then as in the twenty-first century, when a briefing room and explanatory labels were observed as conspicuously absent from his installation, and later in the Thomson Collection.¹³ Sweeney asserted the best education in art came through visual experience of displays prepared with a critical order that stimulated the eye. This ethos resonates in the Thomson Collection.¹⁴

When Ken Thomson passed away unexpectedly in June 2006, the general curatorial program was developing with many decisions remaining. His eldest son, David, assumed responsibility to ensure the presentation of the collection created contexts in which each visitor's quest for self-illumination and discovery would be as direct and unmediated as possible.¹⁵ With the Canadian collection, this included a complete reassessment of its presentation in its new home, including framing, when it was recognized that the collection's diverse frames would not serve it well. This became an opportunity to consider a new presentation of Canadian art, one in which frames would be architectural transitions out of which the pictures call attention as active, even sensual, signals for viewing and engagement.¹⁶ David Thomson's decision to reframe the majority of the Canadian collection was the radical solution to the organizational problem of presenting the collection with the greatest dignity, while clarifying the collection's genius and achievement.¹⁷

Thomson's and the Group's paintings have historically accommodated reframing in disparate styles. Nine years after Tom Thomson's death, his oil sketches were exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now AGO) in diverse frames, and his late canvas, *The West Wind*, was reframed after its 1926 acquisition by the AGT. The survey of twenty sketch frames in the Thomson Collection gallery, "J.E.H. MacDonald and Original Frames," shows their evolution: stylistically and chronologically harmonious Arts and Crafts frames from the 1920s; a frame type specified by Lawren S. Harris (1885–1970); miniature derivations of Louis XIV frames dually signifying the owners' means and taste and their art's importance; 1950s and 1960s frames using a mixture of materials, such as exposed and painted wood, gilding, and fabric; and finally, the frame Ken Thomson used when he installed works from his collection in the Thomson Gallery in Toronto's Simpson Tower, from 1989 to 2004 (Fig. 1).

Discussions of the reframing of the Canadian collection began in the very early 2000s when Ken and David Thomson spoke about reframing the Group works.¹⁸ In 2001, Ken Thomson had Toronto framers The Gilder reframe the recently acquired Harris canvas, *Baffin Island Mountains*, c. 1931, in a new floater frame. Finished with an off-white sprayed lacquer, this frame would directly influence the frames on the Thomson and Group canvases today.¹⁹ Floater frames are characterized by the absences of a rebate and centre or corner mouldings, and a distinct gap between the painting's tacking edge and the frame's sight edge. The floater frame appeared in the interwar period and was refined and entrenched as a paradigm of modern framing after the Second World War by New York framer Robert Kulicke with frames he developed for Knoll Associates, the Guggenheim, and the Museum of



1 | Original frames for Thomson and Group sketches in, “J.E.H. MacDonald and Original Frames,” Thomson Collection of Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, installation 2008-2015. (Photo: Dean Tomlinson © 2015 Art Gallery of Ontario)

Modern Art.²⁰ Although not new to the history of framing, they have seldom been used on Thomson and Group canvases and were not selected by the artists for their works.

Common institutional approaches to reframing a historic painting include using an image of its original frame as a model, considering a frame known to have been used on works by the artist or colleagues during the period, and developing a contemporary approximation. The fixation on original, period, and artists’ frames can be indulged individually, but not with more than 250 works. A painting’s first frame has a singular association because of the painting and frame’s shared history. It may have ended up on the painting because it was specified, or it may have been what the artist or exhibition

organizer could afford. A period frame is also an old frame, although one that might say more about the tastes of a notable early collector than anything about the artist. Artists' frames are beyond criticism, except when they are so idiosyncratic that every frame is unique to its painting or series, and their group installation is visually disruptive. Most short-sighted is the academic desire to create contemporary approximations of historical frames that tend to be visual averages of well-considered historical precedents dominated by the contemporary tastes of the curator and the framer.

Select historic frames were preserved for canvases in the Thomson Collection when the connection between the work and the frame was known, the frame's condition was good, and the work warranted the differentiation. It was also recognized that the form of the frames Harris preferred for his oil sketches could not be improved upon. The historic association between the artist and those frames eased the decision to make recreations of two profiles associated with Harris's Algoma sketches and Rocky Mountain and Arctic sketches. This left nearly 200 sketches in need of frames.

At the AGO and the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), Thomson and Group oil sketches have been exhibited unframed and *en masse* in vitrines or drawers for more than twenty years. The approach maximizes display space, clarifies the object quality of an oil sketch on a rigid support, and allows the viewer to see the entire surface of works that have an uncommonly direct and intimate nature. The approach also removes the sketches from dialogue with related studio canvases, isolates them behind sheets of reflective acrylic, and demotes them to artistic specimens (Fig. 2). None of the techniques used at the AGO and the NGC or the vitrines designed by Gehry would be satisfactory for the Thomson Collection. The solution was less obvious.

The sketches were removed from their old frames. Peter and Elizabeth Porebski, the staff of The Gilder, and David Thomson took their cues from the work of art, focusing on one's reaction when looking at the paintings and the desire to perceive the sketches' unique physical characteristics.²¹ The first iteration mounted the sketch within a hand-cut mat in a glazed box frame similar to what is in use at the AGO. An alternative placed the sketches within a rectilinear window mat, like those used for the Thomson Collection's James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924) sketches, but was discarded because it overemphasized the Thomson and Group sketches as objects. With the smaller and thinner Morrice sketches, around 13 × 16 × 0.2 cm instead of 22 × 27 × 0.32 cm for the Thomson and Group sketches, one sees the painting before the panel. When Thomson and Group sketches were presented this way, the panel was more evident as an object than as a painting.

The Gilder returned to the hand-cut mats, resolved the sketches' presentation on the x- and y-axes by closing the gap between the sketch and



2 | Group of Seven and contemporaries, John Ridley Gallery, J.S. McLean Centre for Canadian Art, installation 2008-2011. (Photo: Craig Boyko © 2015 Art Gallery of Ontario)

the window to within 1 mm, and then found the presentation on the z-axis unsatisfactory. While the z-axis is inconsequential when a work is behind a mat or rebate, without a rebate's constraint the presentation requires a delicate balance. This nuanced problem pivots on the relationship between the space of representation, the representation of space, and the space of representability.²² A painting on a rigid support in plane with its close-cut mat might be read as a continuation of the mat, as if the painting was on a sheet of paper with wide margins. The solution came through the matting. When hinged flush to the rear of the mat, the surfaces of the approximately 0.32 cm thick sketches project beyond the 0.16 cm thick mats: both the space of representation and the representation of space become accessible to the viewer (Fig. 3).²³



3 | Tom Thomson, *Moonlight Algonquin Park*, summer 1915, oil on wood, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario (69196), installed in Thomson Collection of Canadian Art. (Photo: Dean Tomlinson © 2015 Art Gallery of Ontario)

In contrast to the 2001 reframing of *Baffin Island Mountain*, where the choice of an off-white was more important than the lacquer finish, in the reframing for the AGO installation, the frames' finish was considered relative to the tonality of the works and the history of Canadian framing when The Gilder proposed off-white casein painted over a gesso ground.²⁴ Casein on a gesso ground has an elusive quality that subtly absorbs and reflects light like the finest moleskin. In addition, casein's materiality is accentuated in the sketch frames' hand-painted mats, where each pull of the brush is discernible. It is also a historically appropriate aqueous paint long used on furniture and frames, predating acrylic paints, and specifically used on the frames Harris preferred for his Algoma, Rocky Mountain, and Arctic sketches. The Gilder's casein starts pale grey and is variously tinted with black, ochre, and white to achieve a tone harmonious with the painting.²⁵ Each artist's palette determined the tint of the frames for their sketches, and except for a common tone for Harris's Rocky Mountain and Arctic canvases, the frame for each canvas was individually tinted for its painting.²⁶ When the frames were ready for painting, The Gilder painted their office walls with the white Gehry specified for use throughout the galleries of the Thomson Collection of Canadian Art as a final reference, to confirm that the perception of the toning of the frames relative to the artworks remained correct.²⁷

Throughout the framing process, choreographed exchanges between The Gilder and Toronto conservation studio Restorart allowed the installation of the Thomson Collection at the AGO to proceed smoothly. Each painting was unframed by The Gilder and measured for framing. It was then sent to Restorart, where Laszlo Cser and his staff reviewed, treated (if necessary), and documented it. It was returned to The Gilder for a final fitting of its frame, and the process was repeated nearly 600 times. Throughout the process, the conservation and framing was coordinated with the AGO to ensure the paintings arrived in the right sequence for their installation.

The collaboration between The Gilder, Restorart, and David Thomson led to an aspect of the canvases' presentation that further confounds the notion of the frame. This aspect is quietly powerful: gummed cambric affixed by Cser to the tacking margins on the canvases' edges, then toned to a medium grey with a coloured wash that was mixed and applied individually to each canvas according to its hue, works with each canvas and frame as a transition from the viewer's space to the space of the canvas.²⁸ Similar to the toning of the casein, the toning of the cambric was modulated with ivory, black, and earth colours as recessive complements to the paintings' overall chroma. The frames cannot be missed when viewing the canvases, yet the tinted cambric is invisible when directly viewing the canvases. This aspect of the cambric standardizes the tacking margins and the shadow in the well between the



4 | “Tom Thomson,” Thomson Collection of Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, installation 2008-2015. (Photo: Sean Weaver © 2015 Art Gallery of Ontario)

tacking margin and the frame’s sight edge. The shadow modulates the transition between the frame and the painting, and cannot be missed as it becomes a virtual sight edge.

Respecting Roland Barthes’s definition, The Gilder’s frames confound the paradigm of framing paintings by Thomson and the Group with their absences of rebates and centre or corner mouldings: they are visually consistent and effortlessly share spaces with other styles of frames; they are at odds with the history of framing because they do not imitate metal through gilding; they do not evoke their materiality or the content of the paintings with exposed wood; they are installed with their hanging hardware obscured and never lean out of plane with the architecture (Fig. 3).

The great achievements of the reframing of the Thomson and Group works in the Thomson Collection are how the frames allow unimpeded access to the art, how they allow those unfamiliar with the artists to see the works clearly, and how they allow those familiar with the artists to see their

work anew. Simply, the commitment to having complete access to the space of representation liberates one to see everything the artist saw. The frames neither advertise themselves nor what they surround. In their neutrality they serve the paintings and the viewer, and further the Thomson Collection's implicit faith in art and the viewer (Fig. 4).

NOTES

- 1 For his collecting, see *Ken Thomson the Collector*, ed. Conal Shields (Toronto: Skylet Publishing / Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008).
- 2 J.E.H. MacDonald, *Algoma*, 1920, oil on wood-pulp board, 21.4 × 26.4 cm (8.4375 × 10.375 in.). The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (103874).
- 3 The Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario includes the Thomson Collection of Canadian Art, the Thomson Collection of European Art, and the Thomson Collection of Ship Models. For convenience in this context, "Thomson Collection" will apply only to the Canadian collection.
- 4 Other extraordinary gifts include: James MacCallum's 134 works by Tom Thomson and contemporaries to the National Gallery of Canada; Robert and Signe McMichael's 194 paintings to the Province of Ontario to establish the McMichael Conservation Collection of Art (Joan MURRAY, *McMichael Canadian Art Collection: One Hundred Masterworks* [Kleinburg, ON: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 2006], 4–5); and Blair Laing's 83 works by James Wilson Morrice to the NGC.
- 5 For the most fulsome coverage, AGO *Opening Press Coverage, November 2008* (14 articles, 8–30 November 2008), file "Ontario—Toronto—Art Gallery of Ontario (2008)," Edward P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario; Sarah MILROY, "Unmasking art's dazzling pleasures – and its complexities," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 15 Nov. 2008; Daniel BAIRD, "What Are Museums For?" *Canadian Art* 25:1 (Spring 2009): 58–65; and three master's theses focused on the expansion or the installation of Canadian art throughout the AGO. None observed the reframing or its implications.
- 6 Grace GLUECK, "What's in a Frame? Less and Less at the Modern," *The New York Times* (15 July 1984); Hilton KRAMER, "MoMA Reopened: The Museum of Modern Art in the Postmodern Era," *The New Criterion* (August 1984); Anonymous, "Editorial." *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 4:2 (June 1985): 115–17; Reesa GREENBERG, "MoMA and Modernism: The Frame Game," *Parachute* (March, April, May 1986): 21–31; Richard R. BRETTELL, "The Art of the Edge: The Art Museum and the Picture Frame," in *The Art of the Edge: European Picture Frames*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1986), 18; and Andrea KIRSH and Rustin S. LEVINSON, *Seeing Through Paintings: Physical Examination in Art Historical Studies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 253, and 284 n. 9.
- 7 Edward J. SOZANSKI, "Whose Bounty Was Shared With An Entire City," *The Inquirer* (Philadelphia), 22 June 1986. Accessed 28 May 2014, http://articles.philly.com/1986-06-22/entertainment/26044443_1_cone-collection-

- appreciation-for-modern-art-claribel-and-miss-etta; Brenda RICHARDSON, *In the Spotlight: What's in a Frame?* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1993), unpagged; and Glenn McNATT, "Cones' Matisse paintings to get their original, gilt frames back. New BMA chief's move gets positive reviews," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 Mar. 1998. Accessed 24 Sept. 2013, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1998-03-03/news/1998062111_1_henri-matisse-matisse-paintings-bolger.
- 8 For his definition of the neutral, see, Roland BARTHES, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–1978)*, translated from the French by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 6. Barthes hardly touches on fine art, and this application employs the concept as a speculum rather than a skeleton key.
- 9 At their best, programs such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel's in the Berliner Gemäldegalerie and The Gilder's in the Thomson Collection show sensitivity to the aesthetics and dimensions of diverse bodies of work through subtly scaled mouldings appropriate to the size of the work. Bettina VON ROENNE, *Ein Architekt rahmt Bilder: Karl Friedrich Schinkel und die Berliner Galerie*, published in conjunction with the exhibition, "Ein Architekt rahmt Bilder: Karl Friedrich Schinkel und die Berliner Galerie" shown at Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Gemäldegalerie (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Gemäldegalerie, 2007), 42–59.
- 10 James ADAMS, "Thomson hands AGO \$370-million donation," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 Nov. 2002.
- 11 Among the seventeen spaces are one each for Paul-Émile Borduas, Emily Carr, Harris, A.Y. Jackson, William Kurelek, Morrice, and Thomson; two for J.E.H. MacDonald; three for David Milne, and five for Cornelius Krieghoff.
- 12 Charlotte KLONK, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 206–11.
- 13 Aline B. SAARINEN, "Lively Gallery for Living Art," *New York Times Magazine* (30 May 1954), 27, and James BRADSHAW, "Art Gallery of Ontario Label-Free Paintings: Thomson galleries put the art before the source," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 Dec 2008.
- 14 SAARINEN, "Lively Gallery for Living Art," 27.
- 15 David THOMSON, "Ken Thomson, The Collector," in *Ken Thomson the Collector*, 11.
- 16 Carsten THAU, "Murder Incorporated: The Frame in Works of Art from Matisse to Microsoft Windows," in *Frames: State of the Art* (exh. cat.), ed. Henrik Bjerre. Trans. Jeremy Watts (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2008), 211.
- 17 This was also done with the 64 paintings and watercolours by Milne and the 71 oil sketches and canvases by Morrice on view at the AGO.
- 18 Peter Porebski (The Gilder) interview with the author, 26 June 2013, Toronto.
- 19 *Baffin Island Mountains*, c. 1931, oil on canvas, 101.6 × 127.2 cm (103944). Elizabeth and Peter Porebski (The Gilder) interview with the author, 26 June 2013, Toronto.
- 20 Kulicke was William Rubin's framer for his 1984 reframing project at MoMA. Bruce GHERMAN, "20th Century Frame Innovator: Spotlight on Robert Kulicke," *Picture Framing Magazine* 1:1 (January–February 1990): 49.
- 21 Peter Porebski (The Gilder) interview with the author, 26 June 2013, Toronto.
- 22 For Louis Marin, the frame refers to three spaces: the space of representation (the area of colour and composition to be viewed); the representation of space (the mimetic content of the work in the frame); and the space of representability (the space from which the picture is viewed). Louis MARIN, "The Frame of the Painting

or the Semiotic Functions of Boundaries in the Representative Process,” in *A Semiotic Landscape – Proceedings of the First Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, eds. Seymour Chatman, Umberto Eco, and Jean-Marie Klinkenberg (The Hague and New York: Mouton, 1979), 778.

- 23 Peter Porebski (The Gilder), interview with author, 18 Oct. 2013.
- 24 Ibid., 14 Mar. 2014.
- 25 Elizabeth Porebski (The Gilder), interview with the author, 18 Oct. 2013.
- 26 Ibid., 26 June 2013.
- 27 Peter Porebski (The Gilder), interview with the author, 13 Sept. 2013.
- 28 This and all technical details about the cambric, Lazslo Cser, email to author, 20 June 2014.

Recadrage des œuvres de Tom Thomson et du Groupe des sept figurant dans la collection Thomson du Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario : des principes à la pratique

GREGORY HUMENIUK

La collection Thomson d'art canadien, d'art européen et de maquettes de navires s'est développée pendant plus de cinquante ans avant son arrivée au Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario. Lorsque celui-ci a rouvert ses portes au public, le 14 novembre 2008, après son agrandissement et sa rénovation dans le cadre du projet Transformation AGO, plus de deux tiers des quelque 650 peintures et œuvres sur papier canadiennes de la collection Thomson, ainsi que tous les tableaux – sauf sept – de Tom Thomson (1877–1917) et du Groupe des sept, soit plus de 250 toiles, avaient été recadrés expressément pour leur installation au musée. Si le recadrage de la majorité des œuvres de la collection Thomson perpétue la pratique de normalisation des cadres de galerie amorcée au XVII^e siècle, l'entreprise était sans précédent au Canada pour un don de cette taille. Toutefois, à la différence d'autres dons de seuls collectionneurs qui ont transformé leur nouvel environnement de façon indélébile, la collection Thomson a été installée dans des galeries spécialement conçues pour contribuer à sa présentation.

Le programme général de conservation était en expansion lorsque Ken Thomson (1923–2006) s'est éteint subitement en juin 2006. Son fils aîné, David, a alors pris en main la présentation de la collection, collaborant avec Elizabeth et Peter Porebski, de l'atelier d'encadrement torontois The Gilder, de même qu'avec Laszlo Cser, du studio de conservation torontois Restorart, afin de repenser entièrement les besoins et les approches en matière d'encadrement pour des œuvres de James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924), de Tom Thomson, du Groupe des sept et de ses pairs, et de David Milne (1882–1953). Axé sur les cadres des tableaux de Tom Thomson et du Groupe des sept, le présent article aborde les matériaux et finis traditionnels associés aux cadres canadiens des années 1920 et 1930 qui ont été envisagés et utilisés pour les cadres de 2008, le format anachronique des cadres pour les peintures sur toile comme pour les esquisses sur support rigide, ainsi que le rôle du cadre même.

La collection Thomson a connu plusieurs transformations quant aux styles d'encadrement, à l'attitude des galeries et à la réception du milieu de l'histoire de l'art avant son intégration dans un grand musée public en 2008. Il est à noter qu'aucune des réactions au projet Transformation AGO publiées

n'a mentionné le fait que cette collection de premier plan avait été en grande partie dotée de nouveaux cadres d'un blanc nuancé, entièrement différents de ceux choisis par les artistes pour leurs œuvres. La réussite de ce recadrage repose sur une notion de neutralité dérivée de Roland Barthes qui vise à échapper au paradigme de l'encadrement. Les cadres des œuvres historiques de Tom Thomson et du Groupe des sept figurant dans la collection offrent à présent un accès libre à l'art. Ils permettent à ceux qui ne connaissent pas les artistes de contempler clairement leur travail et à ceux qui les connaissent d'y porter un regard nouveau. Les cadres n'attirent l'attention ni sur eux-mêmes ni sur leur environnement. Leur neutralité est ainsi au service de l'œuvre et du visiteur, ce qui renforce l'allégeance implicite de la collection Thomson à ce dernier de même qu'à l'art.