

# LLEWELLYN PETLEY-JONES (1908–1986)



**Llewellyn Petley-Jones, *Self Portrait, Horseshoe Bay*, oil on canvas, 1951, 58" X 48".**

began to use bolder hues in large blocks of colour in his landscapes and portraits, a departure from his early work, which had grown out of the delicate Victorian watercolour tradition. His new style was influenced by the fauvist and cubist movements he studied in France, and he brought those techniques back with him to B.C.

Around the wooded hillsides surrounding Horseshoe Bay, Petley-Jones indulged his interest in plein air painting, tramping around the rough terrain with his canvases and paintbrushes. The landscape brought a new clarity to his works — his European landscapes had been affected by the layers of smog and pollution in the crowded cities there. The B.C. paintings are filled with light, their vivid colour and strong brushwork examples of the influence the fauvist movement still had on his work.

On January 16, 1951, Petley-Jones found himself confined to his indoor studio at Horseshoe Bay by bad weather. He began to paint a cubist self-portrait, and what emerged was unlike anything he had done before. Natural shapes, such as the cat and the artist's figure, are simplified and abstracted into geometric forms. A small vignette pictured through a window behind the painter illustrates boats on Horseshoe Bay. There's a sense of fun in this painting, as if the artist,

Llewellyn Petley-Jones moved to Horseshoe Bay in the early 1950s, when it was little more than a settlement of scattered cottages around a small marina, a considerable journey north from downtown Vancouver. He had just returned to Canada following a successful 15-year period in Europe, where he had been mingling in cafes with artists like Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

The Royal Academy of Art in London had hung Petley-Jones's watercolours on the line — at eye level — an honour that few artists, let alone unknown young Canadian painters, were given. He was invited to show his paintings at the Salon d'Automne in Paris, where Matisse, Picasso, Paul Cezanne, Marc Chagall and other leading painters hung their work — heady days for the Edmonton-born artist.

The accolades, along with the revolutionary art ideas circulating in Paris during the first half of the 20th century, kept Petley-Jones in Europe. He

stuck inside on a rainy day, has decided to try on the identity of Picasso, one of his influences. It's in the harlequin costume, the corked wine bottle, the *Guernica*-style light bulb, and the artist peering slyly from behind the easel as if to say "What do you think of this?"

By 1954, Petley-Jones had returned to Europe, where he lived until his death in 1986. This individual painting, singular in a series of strong B.C. landscapes, obviously appealed to the artist. He took it back overseas with him, where it was acquired by an English collector who kept it until last year. The artist's nephew, Matt Petley-Jones, who runs the Petley-Jones Gallery in Vancouver, learned the portrait was coming up for auction from a client outside of London, and successfully bid on it. "It's funny how the painting has come full circle back to the Vancouver area," he says.

— Beverly Cramp