



Prudence Heward, *Indian Child*, 1936,
oil on plywood, 36 x 30.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Born in Montreal, Prudence Heward (1896–1947) began her art training at the Art Association of Montreal before travelling to England to work for the Red Cross during the First World War. Thereafter, her artistic training continued in Montreal and later in London and Paris. Beginning early in her career Heward received recognition and awards for her paintings. In addition to her

affiliations with the Beaver Hall Group, the Canadian Group of Painters, and the Contemporary Arts Society, she had friends among the Group of Seven and exhibited with them. Heward often travelled with artist friends, visiting her family's summer home near Brockville, Ontario, as well as rural Quebec and as far as Bermuda. *Indian Child* (1936), a striking portrait of a young Indigenous girl, shows different stylistic treatment compared to many of Heward's other works. Instead of her typical smooth brushwork, expressive brushstrokes are used to render the wall of the log cabin, blue pinafore dress and pink collared shirt and bow. The work owes its energy to the stylistic treatment and warm tones used, such as the rich ochres and greens in the wood and the skin tones of the child. Although many of Heward's portraits are titled with the name of the sitter, with this work it is only possible to imagine the context in which she encountered and painted the young girl. The child's face expresses sadness or discomfort with sitting for this portrait. She has dark and inquisitive eyes which directly engage the viewer. This emotive work raises questions about the artist's and the government's relations to Indigenous people at the time.

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