

CanadARThistories





# CanadARThistories

*Reimagining the Canadian Art History Survey*

*ALENA BUIS; DEVON SMITHER; ELIZABETH ANNE CAVALIERE;  
JEN KENNEDY; JOHANNA AMOS; AND SARAH E.K. SMITH*



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# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Reimagining the Canadian Art History Survey | vii |
| Acknowledgements                            | 1   |
| About the Authors                           | 2   |

## INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Course Plan for Instructors        | 7  |
| Assessment Package for Instructors | 10 |
| Sample Syllabus                    | 15 |
|                                    | 20 |

## INTRODUCTION

### KNOWING

### ENCOUNTER

### LAND/SCAPE

### PORTRAITURE

### BELONGING

### ABROAD

### INSTITUTIONS

### COLLECTIVITY

### LOCALITIES

### ACTIVISM

### OBJECT STORIES

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| article (1979—) | 295 |
|-----------------|-----|

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Biinjiya'iing Onji (From Inside) (2017)  | 296 |
| "A Cheap Farm House" (c. 1864—)  | 297 |
| Dididaht Legend of Swans and Wolves (c. 1995)  | 305 |
| The Elevated Wetlands (1997-98)  | 306 |
| Les milieux humides surélevés (1997-98)  | 309 |
| The Elgin Trays (1847-54)  | 313 |
| Every Building on 100 West Hastings (2001)   | 317 |
| Grace Lake (1931)  | 321 |
| Homage to Four in Paris (2017)   | 330 |
| Ice Shove, Commissioner Street, Montreal (1884)  | 331 |
| Débâcle, rue des Commissaires, Montréal (1884)   | 337 |
| Icône, le sens du sacré (2009)   | 345 |
| In the Conservatory (1883)   | 351 |
| Inuvik Parka (1960-80)   | 352 |
| Nova Scotia Wool Mural (1953)  | 353 |
| O'Halloran's Outfit (c. 1841)  | 357 |
| Out of the Silence (1997)  | 358 |
| Pariah (2008)  | 359 |
| The Provincial Lunatic Asylum (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health), Toronto (1850) | 366 |
| Sketch of Upper Canada (1795-96)   | 371 |
| Sous le vent de l'île, or 1.47 (1947)  | 376 |
| Stanrock Tailings Wall, Elliot Lake, Ontario (1985)                                    | 377 |
| Terry Fox Memorial (2011)  | 381 |
| Transformation Masks   | 389 |
| The World Famous Gopher Hole Museum, Torrington, Alberta (1996—)                       | 393 |

## STUDENT OBJECT STORIES

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet (2013) | 399 |
| A Sudden Gust of Wind (1993)                               | 405 |

# Reimagining the Canadian Art History Survey



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=498#oembed-1>*



# Acknowledgements

This project is made possible with funding by the Government of Ontario and through eCampusOntario's support of the Virtual Learning Strategy. To learn more about the Virtual Learning Strategy visit: [eCampusOntario Virtual Learning Strategy](#). Announced on December 11, 2020, the VLS is an historic \$50 million investment by the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) intended to drive growth and advancement in virtual learning across the province's post-secondary institutions. The strategy is significantly expanding options for traditional and life-long learning through the accelerated use of both online and hybrid learning.

eCampusOntario's support has allowed us to offer this content as an Open Educational Resource (OER). OERs are instructional resources created and shared in ways so that more people have access to them. This is a different model than traditionally copyrighted materials. OER are defined as teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others (Hewlett Foundation).

Our open course and textbook are openly licensed using a Creative Commons license, and are offered in various e-book formats free of charge, or as printed books that are available at cost.

We are grateful for the guidance and support of Queen's University's Arts and Science ONLINE (ASO), especially Keren Akiva, Wanda Beyer, Julian Enright, and Fenton Issacs. Also at Queen's University, Mark Swartz for his guidance on copyright, and Jenna Dijkema for her care in managing finances.

Many thanks to Claire Hooker for her diligent copy editing and to Christine Poulin for French-English translations, as well as to the extraordinary work by research assistants Beatrice Cloutier-Trepanier and Drew Burton. Thank you to Michael Rattray and Jessica Mace for your advisory support.

We are particularly grateful for our colleagues—the many students, scholars, curators, and artists who have shown such immense enthusiasm and support from the outset. You will see their voices and contributions throughout as the foundations upon which CanadARThistories is built.

The authors would finally like to thank the many students who have motivated us over the years. Your curiosity and enthusiasm have been inspirational, and we want you to know that this resource would not have been possible without your questions and contributions. We hope you have learned as much from us, as we have from you!

**ecampus**  
Ontario



Open Art Histories



**Langara. snəweyət leləm.**  
THE COLLEGE OF HIGHER LEARNING. THE COLLEGE OF HIGHER LEARNING.

# About the Authors



## Open Art Histories

**Open Art Histories (OAH)** is a platform for art, art history, visual art, communication, and museum studies teachers and instructors in Canada. Open to anyone who uses visual and material culture in their pedagogical practices, OAH offers a dynamic and collaborative space for Open Education Resources (OERs), and serves as a virtual community and repository for art and art history instructors at all stages of their academic and professional careers.

**Johanna Amos** is an Academic Skills & Writing Specialist at Student Academic Success Services at Queen's University, where she is also an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Art History & Art Conservation. Her research focuses on the material and visual culture of nineteenth-century imperial Britain, with a particular emphasis on women producers, textile labour, and acts of self-fashioning. She is co-editor (with Lisa Binkley) of *Stitching the Self: Identity and the Needle Arts* (2020).

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# INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES



# Course Plan for Instructors

## CanadARThistories Course Plan for Instructors

CanadARThistories contains:

- a course plan for instructors
- a suggested assessment package for instructors
- a sample syllabus
- thematic modules
- contributor-based object essays.



## About this course and resources

CanadARThistories, a new online course and its associated open learning objects, addresses growing concerns around inclusion, regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization in art history curricula, and is conceived as a response to these ideas. The course highlights the rich visual and material culture of this land through a series of entries, written by subject experts, that focus on the artistic contributions of Indigenous and settler makers. It can be further shaped and reshaped to challenge and redistribute the traditional, chronological, and rigid narratives of Canadian art and to encourage learners to be co-constructors of knowledge.

The course supports a second-year undergraduate survey of art in Canada. Through thematic modules, diverse visual traditions and their intersections will be introduced, as will the changing roles of art in society. The

thematic modules and suggested assignments will centre learners, engaging them in active learning practices and the creation of new learning objects and resources, while also developing critical and analytical skills central to the field of art histories.

The course is easily customized to the needs of individual instructors and institutions. The modular and flexible design of the course enables it to be adapted to blended and face-to-face learning. This course can be used as a “course in a box” that you can incorporate into your learning management system and use. You might choose to customize it by developing your own module overview videos and videos to explain the assignments. We also encourage you to personalize this content by adding your own graphics and visuals. We also have tried to build in flexibility so that you can take bits and pieces that work for you and remix them, as the majority of content is licensed under Creative Commons.

## Accessibility

The developers of CanadARThistories are committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities as defined by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The web version of this resource has been designed in Pressbooks, which complies with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 at the A and AA level. In particular, this resource incorporates the following features:

- content that is accessible to people who use screen-reader technology
- accessible videos—all videos in this resource have captions
- accessible images—all images in this resource that convey information have alternative text
- accessible links—all links use descriptive link text
- information is not conveyed by colour alone.

If you have problems accessing this resource, please contact the project coordinators ([openarthistories@gmail.com](mailto:openarthistories@gmail.com)) so we can address the issue. Please include the following information:

- the name of the resource
- the location of the problem (provide a web address or page description)
- a description of the problem
- the name of the computer, software, browser, and any assistive technology you are using that might help us diagnose and solve the issue.

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Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders and obtain permission to reproduce the images within this work. If you have questions about the use of images within this work, or are a rights holder who would like an image removed, please contact the project coordinators ([openarthistories@gmail.com](mailto:openarthistories@gmail.com)).

## Online and in-person adaptations

Asynchronous online courses: Modules can take the place of lecture, in-class activities, and assigned readings.

In-person or blended courses: Modules can be assigned as reading for an in-person or blended course, and the learning journal activities used as active learning components in a flipped classroom. Alternatively, instructors may wish to use the modules as outlines for in-person lectures and assign one or two learning journal activities as in-class, active learning. Assigned readings can be drawn from the object essays.

# Assessment Package for Instructors

## CanadARThistories Assessment Package for Instructors

These are guidelines for suggested assessments for instructors. Please adapt and include in your sample syllabus and learning management system.

### Recommended Assessment Plan

We recommend the following weighted breakdown of course assessment elements; however, instructors are welcome to re-weight, add, alter, or remove components in order to suit their needs and institutional requirements. Assignment guidelines for students based on this breakdown are provided in the syllabus. Below are notes for instructors.

Note that this course does not include a final exam, which may be required by some institutions. In this instance, we recommend adapting the Visualizing Research assignment as a take-home final exam.

| Assessment           | Recommended Weight  | Comments  | Alignment with Learning Outcomes |
|----------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Learning Journals    | 25%<br>(5%X5; best 5 out of 6)  | These are ongoing activities that can be combined into submitted assignments or discussion board conversations. Students should be encouraged to complete all the Learning Journals as a way to enhance their own learning and note taking.         | 1,3,5                            |
| Visualizing Research | 20%   | This will encourage discussion among peers and will add a level of collaboration and knowledge sharing.   | 4,5,6                            |
| Museum Response      | 20%   | This assignment encourages direct student engagement with art through art objects and art exhibitions, either in person or virtually.   | 1,3,4,5                          |
| Artwork Analysis     | Part I: Proposal – 5%<br>Part II: Peer review – 5%<br>Part III: Submission – 25%<br>TOTAL — 35% | This is a scaffolded assignment that encourages students to take an extended learning process with an art object of their choice. Ultimately, students are working towards creating their own object-essay in the style of those in the course OER. | 1,2,4,5                          |

### Learning Outcomes

1. Look at and describe art and material culture using art historical language, terminology, and methodology.
2. Critically analyze and evaluate Canadian artworks using historical approaches and methods.
3. Find and interpret primary and secondary sources used in art historical research (exhibition catalogues, exhibition reviews, artist statements, museum and art gallery archives).
4. Articulate and support an argument about art and material objects in Canadian contexts.
5. Make connections between the images and objects viewed in class to the visual culture of their world.
6. Engage in discussions about Canadian art histories in relation to decolonization, equity, inclusion,



regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization through different modes of communication.

## Learning Journals

### *Using the Learning Journals*

The learning journals are engagement activities that encourage students to interact with the material in an active way through investigations of the relationships between art and community values, techniques artists use to convey ideas, and strategies for interpreting artwork.

The first and last learning journal of each module are generally larger in scope and act as a pre- and post-assessment. Generally we recommend that students use the learning journals in a module as part of their note-taking for the course as a way to actively set ideas and content from the module.

To accommodate the needs of diverse learners, we recommend having students choose to complete five out of the six activities in the course. If students complete all of them, which we encourage, the highest marked five activities will count towards their final grade.

### *Ways to Structure the Learning Journals into Assessments*

As discussion board prompts:

Post the learning journals of a module each to their own forum; have students choose which forums they want to respond to each week. We recommend having students respond to at least two or three.

As a journal handed in periodically:

Consider flexibility for students in choosing the journal entry they want to write about. Have students choose which three or four learning journals per module they would like to respond to; collect these three or four times throughout the semester for grading. If you choose, you can reduce the amount of activity and introduce flexibility for students by allowing students to drop/skip one activity.

Consider flexibility for students in choosing the journal entry they want to write about (i.e., choose three journals from weeks 1-5), and submit in week 6.

A Complete List of Learning Journal Prompts

## Visualizing Research

This component requires the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) discussion board, or another online platform such as Padlet, Learning Pear, or Jamboard. Because of the creative and multi-formed nature of the assignment, it may even be useful, in instances where such platforms are unavailable, to have students present their assignment as a screenshot or a pdf of a slide or a Photoshop. This assessment will encourage discussion among peers and will add a level of collaboration and knowledge sharing, though you could also shape the assignment as an individually submitted assignment.

This component is intended to act as an alternative to a longer written essay, while simultaneously encouraging foundations for art historical research that will be useful in other, more writing-intensive, assignments such as the Artwork Analysis assignment.

In Module 1: Introduction there is a learning journal specifically on close looking. Students are welcome to extend that learning journal into this assignment. Possible resources for close looking:

- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/start-here-apah/why-art-matters-apah/v/the-power-to-look>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/start-here-apah/intro-art-history-apah/v/visual-analysis>

This assignment requires students to choose and research a specific artwork in the field of Canadian art that they have either encountered in the modules or found on their own (say at a museum visit or public art installation). Using a software program of your and/or their choice (such as Powerpoint, Photoshop, Piktochart, Canva), students should create an infographic that includes, in addition to the work itself:

- a 150-word description of the artwork (shape, size, colour, content, form, style)
- statements on where it was made, its location (geographically and in what museum collection), when it was made, and what in art movements and visual styles it participates
- two 50- to 100-word quotations from a journal article, book, or exhibition catalogue that are properly cited
- a thought-provoking question that has emerged in researching the object
- a list of a minimum of four consulted resources
- a mixture of text and image as well as direct links, excerpts, student drawings, and even other works with which it shares a visual or contextual relationship.

Students should upload their infographics for discussion to either the LMS discussion board or another online platform, such as Learning Pear.

## Museum Response

This assignment has students write a 600-word reflection of a display located in a Canadian museum or gallery collection that they visit in person or view online. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage the following practices: looking at artworks with a new intensity of awareness; thinking widely about the scope of art-historical knowledge; engaging in institutional critique; and organizing thoughts into clear writing.

The assignment includes three parts:

1. A drawing that should be executed to the best of learners' abilities—it is understood that these abilities will vary widely—that captures the relationships between objects in a display. The display can be an entire room or a vitrine. If drawing a virtual exhibition, students should consider the relationships of presented objects in the flow or scroll of the screen; they may choose to draw a web for linked features.
2. A very thorough description. Students should consider the placement of objects, scale, movement and flow of people, location(s) in the gallery, significant details, colour, style, affective qualities, wall text, and anything else they notice. If students describe a virtual display, encourage them to think about placement of images, text and links, location on the website, how to navigate around objects, colour, style, affective qualities, and anything else they notice. Explain that the challenge is to organize this information in a logical and progressive way so that a reader who doesn't see the display can still envisage the collection. It may help to imagine that they are speaking on a cell phone, trying to describing it a friend.
3. Ask questions that address the exhibition from as many different angles as possible. For example, consider the type of institution, curatorial aims, historical context, and critical engagement with some of the themes in Module 8.

Students should be reminded not try to answer the questions asked; rather, the idea is to get students thinking about the widest variety of things that would be possible to discover about the institution and why these things would be important to know. Rather than simply listing questions, develop them into fully elaborated paragraphs that work in essay form. The strongest essays typically work description and questioning into a unified whole, though this is not essential. Because no research is required for this paper, no notes or bibliography are necessary. It is acceptable to write in the first person.

## Artwork Analysis

This renewable, open pedagogy assignment encourages students to create a text in the same form as the object essays that accompany the course, to actively engage learners in co-creating knowledge. Ask students: What artwork or object would you add to these essays?

For this assignment, students will write a 1000-1200 word text in the style of the object essays on an artwork that they think is central to the telling and study of art in Canada. The work can be any object—from the visual to the architectural, the textile to the ephemeral—and can originate from (or outside of) any historical period or geographical location, but it must not already be included in the OER. At the end of the course, students may have the opportunity to edit and publish their entries in CanadARThistories, contributing to a diverse and evolving open resource on the histories of art in Canada.

This assignment has three scaffolded steps. :

- Part I: Proposal—students will identify an object of interest and write a short tentative thesis statement about it.
- Part II: Peer review—after receiving feedback from the teaching team, and having the chance to re-write the proposal work, students will submit the proposal for peer review. Students will provide feedback in the form of a single “food for thought” question, and receive the same from two peers. This will allow students to receive additional feedback and refine their work even more. Grades will be assigned by the teaching team on the quality and thoughtfulness of the peer review questions they provide (2 at 2.5% each for a total of 5%).
- Part III: Submission—after taking feedback from the previous two assignments, students will submit a resolved written document about their proposed topic.

Key Works

## Other Possible Assessments

### Academic Integrity Quiz

The academic integrity quiz is designed to help familiarize students with academic integrity practices at their institution. This quiz is not limited in time, and students can take it as many times as they want. Although it is a mandatory activity, it is not part of the course grade.

### Forum Discussion

The forum discussion enhances collaboration among peers by providing a platform for art analysis and thought exchange. This activity is guided by a question from the instructor and performed in a small group setting.

### Writing About Art

This assignment breaks the process of art writing/art criticism down into five distinct steps: 1) description; 2) analysis; 3) historical context; 4) interpretation; and 5) evaluative judgement. Students choose one work of art (or documentation of a work of art) and write five short texts about it. Each text will practice one aspect of art writing/art criticism. Once students have written and received feedback on all five texts, they then edit them into a single essay about the work of art. This assignment is an opportunity to practice some of the skills that students develop throughout the semester.

### Exhibition Proposal

The assignment asks students to play curator and develop a proposal for an exhibition of works studied in

class. Selecting works and developing a theme for an exhibition will test students' understandings of the course content while giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their own creative and critical insights.

### **Podcast**

Working in groups of four or five, students research one key moment, exhibition, or artwork in the history of telecommunications and internet art, but instead of writing an essay, they create a well-crafted 5-7 minute podcast or video. Two of the goals of this assignment are to present research orally, and consider how digital tools can be used to share academic research with the general public. Together the podcasts produced by the class form a narrative history of telecommunications and internet art from the 1960s to the present.

### **Alternative Text**

This short writing assignment asks students to: think critically about the challenges of translating visual materials into text, practice description skills, and learn about an important accessibility tool in art history. Describing something one sees is a skill that is becoming more and more important in our increasingly visual world. In art history or any subject that uses images, it is also a crucial tool for making visual material accessible to people who are visually impaired. However, accurately and concisely describing the content of an image without analysis or interpretation (which may bias the reader's experience) is more challenging than it seems. For this assignment students use Routledge's Alternative Text Guidelines to write 150- to 200-word alt texts for two artworks that have been discussed in two different lectures.

### **Collecting Contemporary Art**

In this assignment, ask students: Imagine that you were asked to propose a work of contemporary art for the National Gallery of Canada's collection. What would you choose and why? This individual research assignment takes students through the process of researching and writing an acquisition report for a museum. This process involves: 1) researching and developing a short list of works by five contemporary artists; 2) researching and understanding the collection to determine which of the five shortlisted works will best enhance the current holdings; and 3) writing an acquisition report proposing the purchase of the work selected. The final submission will include an "Acquisition Proposal Portfolio" containing all of these components.

# Sample Syllabus

## CanadARThistories Course Syllabus [Download Here]

Instructor: [Name] (pronouns)

Course dates:

Online Orientation Session:

Final Day to Submit Materials:

Other Important Date(s):

Contact Info:

Office Hours:

[Insert Indigenous Territorial Land Acknowledgement here. See [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca) for more.]

### Course Description:

The study of art history in Canada has long relied on chronology and emphasizing artworks that visually extend and reinforce Canada as a nation. This colony-to-nation narrative, evident in texts such as Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (1973), remained the definitive account for students and educators for decades. Other voices have intervened since 1973; however, there remains a paucity of textbooks in Canadian art history, and there is a particular absence of work that sketches a broad history of art in Canada while also responding to the pressing concerns of decolonization, and diverse and inclusive representation. As researchers and instructors of Canadian art histories, we know how rich and dynamic the field is, but the teaching of art in Canada has yet to reflect this. Instructors are looking for alternatives beyond course packs and textbooks to break apart and challenge the canonical nature of the discipline in course design and pedagogical practice. CanadARThistories is a new online course with associated open learning objects. It addresses growing concerns around inclusion, regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization in art history curricula, and is conceived as a response to these ideas. The course will highlight the rich visual and material culture of this land through a series of entries, written by subject experts, that focus on the artistic contributions of Indigenous and settler makers. It can be further shaped and reshaped to challenge and redistribute the traditional, rigid narratives of Canadian art and encourage learners to be co-constructors of knowledge.

### Guiding Principles of this Course:

1) This is our class, not my class. During our orientation, we will build our class culture together. If something's not working, we'll change it. If you have a great idea for an activity, share it with me.

2) I will give you choice. In each assignment, you'll have some options for how to show your learning. If you're not interested in any of those options, let's talk. The more interested you are in this course, the better you'll do.

3) Community is as important as content. A lot of research shows that a student's connection with their instructor and their classmates is the #1 predictor of success in a class. Online classes can feel isolating, so I have tried my best to build in community. We'll decide together what that community looks like.

4) We will be flexible. I've tried to build flexibility into this course, but there is room for more. Your timeline might not look like your classmate's timeline, and that's okay.

5) We will do work that we're proud of. I want you to do assignments that you're excited to show your friends and that you think about after the class is over. I will try to give you a real-life audience. But again: if you have an idea for a project, come and talk to me.

6) We'll focus on process, not product. To be a good writer, you need to take risks and constantly plan, write and revise. This course is set up to give you lots of opportunities to try again. You'll get regular feedback and you can make changes based on what you've learned. You can revise and resubmit assignments, for example. I hope to dial down the grade pressure, since grades have been shown to negatively impact learning.

## Learning Outcomes:

This course offers you the opportunity to:

- look at and describe art and material culture using art historical language, terminology, and methodology
- critically analyze and evaluate Canadian artworks using historical approaches and methods
- find and interpret primary and secondary sources used in art historical research (exhibition catalogues, exhibition reviews, artist statements, museum and art gallery archives)
- articulate and support an argument about art and material objects in Canadian contexts
- make connections between the images and objects viewed in class to the visual culture of their world
- engage in discussions about Canadian art histories in relation to decolonization, equity, inclusion, regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization through different modes of communication.

## Required Texts:

In addition to the module content, the required readings, viewings, and listenings are interspersed directly throughout weekly modules. The lack of separation between course content and course readings puts them directly in dialogue with one another, but it does mean that it may take you longer than you expect to move through a module (approximately 7-8 hours in total).

## Contacting Me:

Email is the best way to reach me. I will respond to your email as quickly as possible. Please email me at In general, online courses work best when there's a lot of communication between student and instructor. We can work together and come up with a solution for nearly every problem.

## Office Hours:

[Insert details here including the preferred method to meet (e.g. Zoom, MSTeams, institutional platform, Phone,

etc.]. We will decide a time that works for most people during our orientation. You don't have to make an appointment to show up at my office hours.

If you'd like to meet with me outside of my office hours, just email me and we'll set up a time.

Also, before assignments are due, we will have a writing party. You can sign on any time during the 2-hour time slot. We'll just work on our assignments together, and you can ask me questions when you have them as you work.

## Course Format:

10 weekly modules [institutional required total hours]

Synchronous/Asynchronous Online, Mixed-Mode, Face-to-Face [describe mode]

[Description for Asynchronous Online] This course is created so that you can work at your own pace. This course is set up into small chunks called modules, which are themed around a topic. The modules will take you one week to complete, and you can work at your own pace.

You can also hand in assignments at your own pace. To improve your writing, you'll need regular feedback. I've set up due dates, but these are flexible. Just make sure that you talk to me first if you want to hand in work after the due date.

For a recommended schedule see the course map below:

| Week   | Dates   | Module             | Assignments |
|--------|---------|--------------------|-------------|
| One    | [enter] | Introduction       |             |
| Two    |         | Knowing            |             |
| Three  |         | Encounter          |             |
| Four   |         | Landscape          |             |
| Five   |         | Portraiture        |             |
| Six    |         | Belonging          |             |
| Seven  |         | Abroad             |             |
| Eight  |         | Institutions       |             |
| Nine   |         | Anti/Establishment |             |
| Ten    |         | Localities         |             |
| Eleven |         | Activism           |             |

## Assignments:

These assignments are set up to reward your process, not your product. That means that you'll have lots of opportunities to try again, and you'll be rewarded for taking risks, even if those risks don't pay off. Many assignments are also participation-based. If you do the work, you'll get the points. To say it simply: I want you to do well, and there are many opportunities for you to do your best work.

| Type                 | Weight  | Learning Outcomes |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| Learning Journals    | 25%<br>(5%X5; best 5 out of 6)  | 1,3,5             |
| Visualizing Research | 20%   | 4,5,6             |
| Museum Response      | 20%   | 1,3,4,5           |
|                      | Part I: Proposal – 5%   |                   |
| Artwork Analysis     | Part II: Peer review – 5%<br>Part III: Submission – 25%<br>Total: 35% | 1,2,4,5           |

## Submission Policy:

Handing in assignments by the deadlines will help me give you timely feedback. However, life happens. If you need more time, simply ask. You don't need to tell me why you need an extension. If you have an extension, it may take me a little longer to give you feedback because I might be grading papers for other classes. [You may want to add your own late policy here.]

## Academic Integrity Policy:

This class teaches how to use sources, so we'll talk a lot about academic integrity. I approach most academic integrity violations as opportunities to learn. If I find evidence of improper source use in your work, I will ask to meet with you and you will be required to revise your work. In rare cases, such as when I find evidence of ghostwriting, I may pursue formal plagiarism charges. Please familiarize yourself with [link to your institution's policy].

## Student Conduct Policy:

The University ascribes to the highest standards of conduct. Adhering to these standards of conduct means observing the values on which an academic community must be founded: respect, safety, civility, inclusiveness, and freedom from harassment and discrimination. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with these values. These standards of conduct require that students obey the law, be aware of and abide by University policies, behave in a safe and civil manner, demonstrate respect for members of the University's community, and demonstrate respect for the University's and its community members' property and resources.

To learn more, please read the [link to your institution's student conduct policy].

## Diversity and Inclusion Policy:

We will work hard to build a classroom community that works for everyone. Please familiarize yourself with [link to your institution's diversity and inclusion policy].

[Other Institution-Specific Policies:]



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# INTRODUCTION

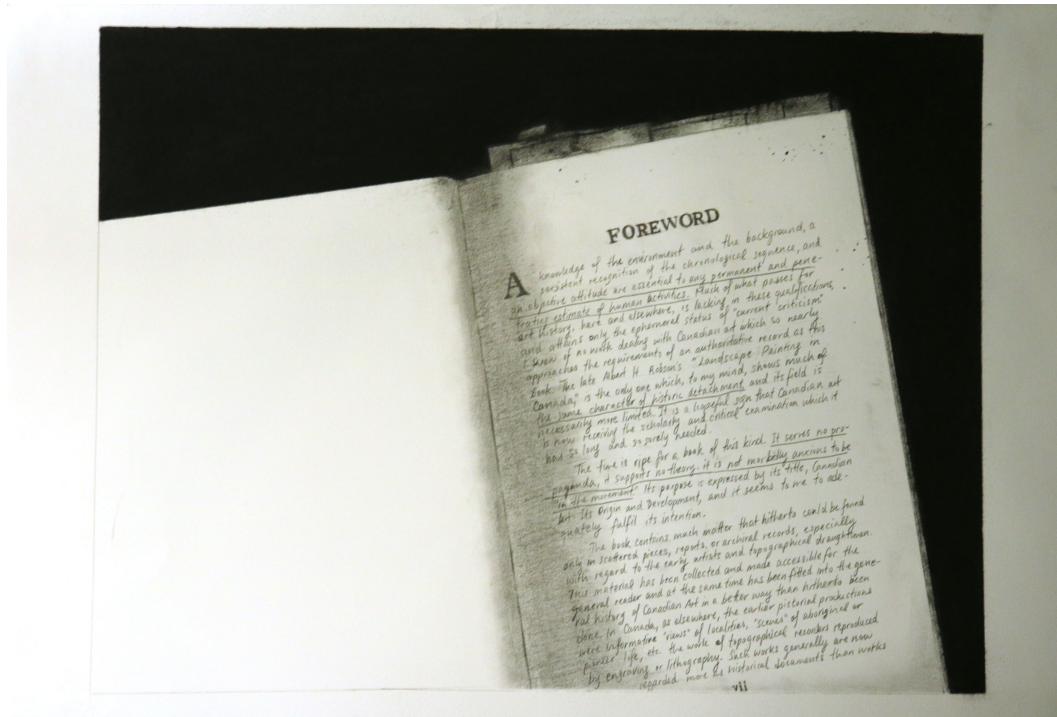


Figure 1.1 Florence Yee, *A History of Canadian Art History*, 2016. Graphite and charcoal on paper, 38.1 x 55.8 cm. Artist's collection. Courtesy Florence Yee.

Florence Yee's series of graphite and charcoal drawings, *A History of Canadian Art History* (2016), annotates and edits the "official" story of art in Canada. Each drawing reproduces and alters pages from well-known and widely available books on Canadian art, including J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History* (1991 [originally printed in 1966]), Joan Murray's *The Best of the Group of Seven* (1993), and *Canadian Artists in Exhibition* (1974), among others. The revisions and additions that Yee makes to these books raise important questions about identity and representation in Canadian art history: Who has told the story of art in Canada? How has it been told? Who has been included? And who has been left out? Yee's summary of the Table of Contents of Paul Duval's *High Realism in Canada* (1974), for example, illuminates a significant problem in Canadian art historiography: the book is "92% male" and "100% white."

Watch Florence Yee discuss their text-based practice and creative process in this short video.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistory/?p=3#oembed-1>

In another drawing in the series, *A History of Canadian Art History*, Yee replaces the epigraph to Chapter One of William Colgate's book *Canadian Art, Its Origin and Development* (1943) with their own inscription. An epigraph is a quote at the beginning of a text that summarizes or symbolizes the major subjects or themes. Colgate begins his chapter with an excerpt from American scholar Barrett Wendell, "The days of journeying are not generally days of harvest; but the seeds which fall in those pleasant times are apt to sink deep." In Yee's charcoal drawing, by contrast, they describe what follows as "A chapter about how Canadian art began with

European settlers in 1820, almost as if there was no one here before that..." This sentence not only encapsulates the narrative arc of Colgate's opening, but it also summarizes a larger pattern in conventional colony-to-nation histories of art in Canada. By signing their name to the epigraph, Yee, a queer second-generation Cantonese-Canadian artist based in Tkaronto/Toronto and Tiohtià:ke/Montreal, considers how their own voice relates to these stories and reveals how these stories appear from their perspective.

Under the revised epigraph, Yee faithfully transcribes Colgate's first paragraph, which reads, "It is customary for us to confuse the birth of a national art movement in Canada with the emergence of the Group of Seven in 1919. The fact is, that Canadian art, as we know it today, had its inception at a much earlier time. It really began with. . ." Although the angle and cropping of the drawing cut off parts of the remaining passage, the names of celebrated European settler artists Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff appear several times.

Colgate was not the first scholar to begin their history of Canadian art with Kane and Krieghoff. This particular origin story dates back to Albert H. Robson's 1932 volume *Canadian Landscape Painters*. Most significant publications from the first half of the 20th century not only focus on the European origins of art in Canada, but also limited their study to art produced in Ontario. In one of the few recent survey textbooks on Canadian art history, art historian Laurier Lacroix recognizes that *Painting in Canada: A History* by J. Russell Harper (published in 1966) was "the first survey book to make an effort to provide genuinely national coverage" (2010, 417). In other words, it was not until 1966 that a book covered art from coast to coast in Canada. Yee's series includes a drawing of the back cover of the compact edition of Harper's book, which features a blurb describing Harper as the "'ultimate authority' on the subject" and calling the book "the first comprehensive survey of Cana[dian] painting from its beginnings in the seventeenth century." Yee highlights the phrase, "ultimate authority" by bolding the text and asks the viewer to reflect on this characterization. What does it mean to proclaim someone the ultimate authority of a subject as broad and diverse as the history of art in Canada?

In recent years, there have been many more attempts to tell the story of Canadian art historiography (the way in which art history has been written by authorities in the field). In "Writing Art History in the Twentieth Century," Lacroix articulates some of the challenges associated with this project:

*The fact that the scholarly study of Canadian art history was developing while the discipline [of art history] was being reassessed on an international level raised the issue of how historians could develop the study of Canadian cultural production when they were dealing with inadequate archives and published documentation. The lack of a nationally agreed upon corpus of iconic artworks that could constitute the basis of Canadian art history exacerbated this situation. In contrast, by 1960 there already existed more than 30 or 40 years of extensive research in a wide variety of aspects of European and American art. The significance of this was often confirmed by the marketplace, by numerous museum exhibitions, and by important publications. In Canada, however, historians had to identify and define the very body of works that constituted Canadian art. The scholarship of Gerard Morisset earlier in the century, when he had inventoried Quebecois artworks, was still relatively unknown in the early 1960s; so was much English-Canadian art writing, which was principally about landscape. Art historians were therefore doing the necessary work of discovering and documenting art produced in Canada, identifying its significance, and interpreting it at the same time, all the while taking into account the evolving criteria for the discipline of art history itself* (2010, 413-4).

In the above passage, Lacroix explains that the "scholarly study of Canadian art history" developed in the 1960s. While he recognizes that scholars have been writing and teaching about art in Canada for much longer, there was a real increase in work on the topic in this decade and, at the same time, courses on Canadian art started to be regularly taught at colleges and universities. As Lacroix points out, the 1960s and 1970s were also a time when the discipline of art history as a whole was undergoing a transformation as art historians started to adopt interdisciplinary methodologies informed by feminism, Marxism, anthropology, sociology, politics, and cultural studies, among other fields, and became increasingly aware of the relationships between art, culture, and the broader social and political world.

What do you think art history is? What are its subjects? What methods or practices does it involve? Can you think of any challenges that might be particular to studying the history of art in Canada?

Yee's interventions into Canadian art texts demonstrate that they are neither neutral nor definitive. Like all scholarship, textbooks are the products of a series of decisions about what (and who) to include, what to exclude, and how these things are framed and written about. The story of Canadian art has, most often, been told through monographs. A monograph is a single-subject book written by a single author. By inserting their own voice into these monographic texts—that is, by reframing and rewriting their narratives—Yee is doing what this course also attempts to do. *CanadARThistories* provides materials that will help you ground and situate yourself in relation to the diverse art histories of this land we now call Canada. The course has been designed to encourage you to bring your own prior knowledge, understandings, and worldviews into the learning process. It attempts to pull apart and challenge settler-centric, linear, and colonial narratives of Canadian art history by bringing in different voices—including your own.

## By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- identify some of the key authors of well-known books on Canadian art history
- acknowledge the Indigenous territory you occupy
- describe the schedule, assessments, and expectations of this course
- reflect on the goals of this course and how you will achieve them
- look closely to formally analyze an artwork.

## It should take you:

***A History of Canadian Art History*** Text 10 min, Video 9 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**Course description and learning outcomes** Text 6 min, Video 10 min

**Guiding questions** Text 6 min

**Situating ourselves** Text 2 min, Video 2 min

**Land acknowledgements** Text 5 min, Video 4 min

**CanadARThistories: redefining (art) history** Text 30 min

**Judging a book by its table of contents** Text 20 min

**Close looking/slow looking** Videos 3 x 10 min, Close looking journal activity 60 min

**Learning journals** 8 x 20 min = 160 min

**Total: approximately 5.5 hours**

## Key works:

- Fig. 1.1 Florence Yee, *A History of Canadian Art History* (2016)
- Land acknowledgements: uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto, Selena Mills and Sara Roque with illustrations by Chief Lady Bird

## Course description

Like the discipline of history more broadly, the writing of art history in Canada has followed (and helped to reinforce) a nation-building narrative. Since the discipline of art history formed in the 19th century, the nation and national narratives have been the overriding foundation for much art historiography. As Kristy A. Holmes notes, “From the early to mid-twentieth century, the publication of several surveys helped to consolidate the history of Canadian art as a field of study. Texts by Newton MacTavish, William Colgate, Graham McInnes, and Donald Buchanan, among others, established a narrative that linked the development of visual art with that of the colony-to-nation narrative of traditional Canadian history” (51). This colony-to-nation narrative, evident in texts such as Dennis Reid’s *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (1973), remained the definitive account for students and educators for decades. Other voices have intervened since 1973; however, there is still a paucity of textbooks in Canadian art history, particularly texts that both sketch a broad history of art in Canada and respond to the pressing concerns of decolonization and diverse and inclusive representation. As researchers and instructors of Canadian art histories, we know how rich and dynamic the field is, but the teaching of art in Canada has yet to reflect this. Instructors and students are looking to break apart and challenge the canonical nature of the discipline in both course design and pedagogical practice. *CanadARThistories* is a new online course with associated Open Educational Resources (OER) that addresses growing concerns around inclusion, regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization in art history curricula, and is conceived as a response to these issues. Through weekly thematic modules, the course highlights the rich visual and material culture of this land, focusing on the artistic contributions of Indigenous and settler makers.

The following video provides an overview of this course, introduces you to its creators, and explains some of the inspirations and questions behind it.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=3#oembed-2>

*CanadARThistories: Reimagining the Canadian Art History Survey* was created in an effort to showcase the rich and dynamic histories of visual and material culture in what we now call Canada. Canadian art has long been shaped by colonial legacies, regional divisions, and the canonization of national imagery.

What does this mean? It means that Canadian art history is very complex and there is no single history of art in Canada; rather there are histories plural, told from numerous perspectives, voices, places, and moments. The goal of this course is not to get you to memorize artworks—the goal is to get you thinking and talking critically about art in all its forms across Canada. By the end of this course, you should be able to walk into any museum or gallery, or flip open any book on Canadian art, and have a conversation about what you see. We also hope that you will be able to look at an object or artwork and see how it engages with ideas and histories that are often much bigger than what you see before you.

## By the end of this course you will be able to:

- look at and describe art and material culture using art historical language, terminology, and methodology
- critically analyze and evaluate Canadian artworks using historical approaches and methods
- find and interpret primary and secondary sources used in art historical research including, exhibition catalogues, exhibition reviews, artist statements, and museum and art gallery archives
- articulate and support an argument about art and material objects in the context of Canada
- make connections between the images and objects viewed in class with the larger visual world
- engage in discussions about Canadian art histories in relation to decolonization, equity, inclusion, regionalism, Indigenization, and internationalization.

## Guiding questions

As Dr. Cavaliere explains in the introductory video, *CanadARThistories* will introduce you to some of the diverse and dynamic histories of visual and material culture across the land we now call Canada. It also asks you to reflect on your own relationship to these histories and the ways in which you learn them—not only in this course but outside of it as well. Historian John Douglas Belshaw outlines the ideas behind this approach in the introduction to his Open Educational Resource *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*:

*Historical studies demand that we learn something about the past but it also requires us to ask how it is we know what we think we know about the past. When you read an academic history text, you'll observe that historians typically want to prove something about events in the past. For example, they want to show that one individual played a critical role, or that environmental change was a silent but critical player, or that prejudices affecting one group had an unanticipated outcome. At the same time, however, historians are keen to prove the value of their sources. They might argue, for example, that this census record or that judicial file or some set of private correspondence offers special insights that have not before been made available.*

*Although it may be simplistic, perhaps too simplistic, you may find it helpful to think about the study of history as a combination of the “what” and the “how.” That is, what happened and how we know it happened.*

*Grappling with the Canadian past is fraught with challenges and alive with exciting questions crying out to be addressed. But what constitutes the “Canadian” past? Clearly, the geographic space we call Canada is a relatively recent invention. Confederation, beginning in 1867, spread the brand beyond the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes to include other British colonies on the east and west coasts and some of the land in between. As a political idea—a country made up of provinces and territories with a constitution, flag, anthem, etc.—it continues to evolve. But in 1867 it was just one of many colonies in the British Empire and not necessarily the pick of the litter. A century and 10 years earlier it was part of a French empire that claimed influence over a much larger territory than the Canada of today. Still another century earlier, “Canada” referred to a struggling chain of frightened and fortified settlements along the St. Lawrence.*

*Let's push it back yet another century and more. Around 1567 the northern half of North America was a well-populated landscape made up of a multitude of diverse cultures. Their economies and relationships were continually changing while retaining core (and important shared) features from one generation to the next. The “Canada” of 1497 — one small patch of which may have been briefly visited by John Cabot and his crew — was a vastly more populous and rich human environment than would re-emerge here until the 19th century.*

*So whose Canada do we study? The Canada of the French? Of the Naskapi? Of the Basque whalers*

*with their toeholds on the east coast? Of the Nuu-chah-nulth or the Acadians? When was Canada? Are there themes we can draw across generations and centuries? Are there successions of transitions as tumultuous and irreversible as rapids on a river? Who gets to tell those stories and whose voices are likely to remain silent?*

*It is only by asking questions such as these that history—as an activity—can be undertaken (Belshaw 2015).*

## LEARNING JOURNAL 1.2

Consider Belshaw's questions at the end of this excerpt and try to answer them for yourself: "So whose Canada do we study? The Canada of the French? Of the Naskapi? Of the Basque whalers with their toeholds on the east coast? Of the Nuu-chah-nulth or the Acadians? When was Canada? Are there themes we can draw across generations and centuries? Are there successions of transitions as tumultuous and irreversible as rapids on a river? Who gets to tell those stories and whose voices are likely to remain silent?"

## Situating ourselves

In the following video, Sarah Stanners, former Curator of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, discusses what "the Art of Canada" means and how it might expand beyond or even challenge the national borders of Canada as a country.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=3#oembed-3>

## LEARNING JOURNAL 1.3

Do you consider yourself Canadian? Why or why not? You may not feel that you identify as Canadian if you are Indigenous or new to Canada, for example. Reflect on your identity. This course addresses issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and other intersecting aspects of identities. Consider how your own identity may influence your views of Canadian art or art in Canada.

Please spend some time reviewing the materials provided for this course. Read the course outline, assessment instructions, learner survey, and anything else your instructor has provided.



What questions do you have about the course? Spend some time reflecting on your goals for this course. What do you want to accomplish? What do you need to do to achieve your goals? How can your instructor help? Have you taken a course like this before? If so, what can you do to prepare? If not, what are your concerns?

## Land acknowledgments

As you will see in Module 3: Land/Scape, landscape is a historically contingent and politically powerful concept. In Canada and other colonial nations, this requires that we acknowledge the all-too-often overlooked (and erased) historical and continual inhabitation of the land on which we reside.

Please take a moment to watch the compelling land acknowledgements video (4 minutes) by Selena Mills and Sara Roque with illustrations by Chief Lady Bird, who express that: “land acknowledgements might seem like a small and simple gesture, but like many of our Indigenous ways, they are designed to evolve and hopefully hold much more meaning than the words alone—and to allow us to re-imagine the real story of this land, together.”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=3#oembed-4>

Consider this excerpt from the native-land.ca website:

*Why acknowledge territory? Territory acknowledgement is a way that people insert an awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life. This is often done at the beginning of ceremonies, lectures, or any public event. It can be a subtle way to recognize the history of colonialism and a need for change in settler colonial societies.*

*However, these acknowledgements can easily be a token gesture rather than a meaningful practice. All settlers, including recent arrivants, have a responsibility to consider what it means to acknowledge the history and legacy of colonialism. What are some of the privileges settlers enjoy today because of colonialism? How can individuals develop relationships with peoples whose territory they are living on in the contemporary Canadian geopolitical landscape? What are you, or your organization, doing beyond acknowledging the territory where you live, work, or hold your events? What might you be doing that perpetuates settler colonial futurity rather than considering alternative ways forward for Canada? Do you have an understanding of the on-going violence and the trauma that is part of the structure of colonialism?*

*Territory acknowledgements are one small part of disrupting and dismantling colonial structures. Using the map at <https://native-land.ca/> find where you live and note the traditional territories that you currently reside on. Perhaps you are already aware of the lands you live on. Whether or not you were, reflect on what it means to you to acknowledge the land, the territory that you occupy.*

Research the land you currently occupy. Write a land acknowledgement reflecting your relationship to the land.

## CanadARThistories: redefining (art) history

Published to mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation, the commemorative volume *Art in Canada* by Marc Mayer offers a new way of looking at the history of art in our country. In his essay, the former Director of the National Gallery of Canada explores the ways in which art reflects shared history and helps shape identity, while also raising thorny questions about the role of art in Canada:

*Traditionally, the story of art making in Canada begins with the Baroque church decorations of the early French settlers. It cherishes the scant surviving relics of European culture as it first bloomed in the Canadian wilderness.*

*From the rustic efforts of seventeenth-century priests, we fade to eighteenth-century soldiers and the quaint topographical watercolours of the conquering British army. Concerning itself mostly with the successors of these pioneers, the chronicle advances to smile warmly upon the homegrown painters and sculptors, French and English, who would eventually return to Europe in search of advanced training. We celebrate the other Europeans who came to depict our already complicated young colony, its people, places and manners. The tale turns dark for a time, as the settlers paint what they mournfully took to be a last look at the new land's ancient cultures. Soon enough though, we begin to revel in the painted vistas of the land itself and the bold prospects we appended to Europe's grand tradition. The story marches forward, telling of our industries, our growing cities and foreign victories, while relishing the local flavours we imparted to succeeding international styles; it heralds the waning of our brief academy against unstoppable modernism; it cheers energizing liberation from old media, skills and subject matter; it applauds the exuberant experiments and the strident, reformist dissent that replaced the old ways. Finally, the rousing legend leaves us rapt in the drama of our confident present, an exciting time for a diverse community of multi-ethnic, multi-disciplinary, worldly, eclectic and autonomous professional artists whose names, at long last, are repeated beyond our borders.*

*The conventional art history of Canada is an optimistic adventure that should fill us with satisfaction. Unfortunately, it has problems. Aside from the constraints of space, an important difficulty we face in an art museum like ours is how to account for the present with the objects in our collections and with the sequence of artists who populate the standard narrative. Generally, art historians are preoccupied with the task of analyzing and cataloguing the work of exceptional figures from the past, the most generative of our creators, the outliers. But many of the exceptional figures of the present – such as women, Indigenous artists, Canadians of non-European descent, photographers, video artists – appear like erratic boulders on the land, unaccountable. The histories that might explain them are not part of the conventional narrative of Canadian art because canons are not inductive; they wait for brilliance and spurn the intervals. This gives the impression that much of our present culture is orphaned, while the legacies of the past are extinct. Given what we know of human nature and of how history actually works, neither can be true.*

*From the very first pages of our art history books, we sense trouble ahead. For example, the canonical*

version usually ignores the astonishing work of the highly skilled nuns who also decorated Canada's early colonial churches, women who suffered similar deprivations and equally grave risks. They were clearly more competent in their artistry than their brethren priests who, for the most part, improvised as painters and sculptors to fulfill the needs of the Catholic ritual. The traditional division of cultural labour between men and women explains art history's omission of surpassing talents like Marie Lemaire des Anges. Since the Renaissance, the promotion of painting and sculpture as the most serious supports for art was at the expense of the other artistic crafts, notably those practised by women and non-Europeans. This is not only a Canadian problem, of course, but it has the awkward manifestation here that places outstanding examples of Baroque embroidery in history museums, while the cruder handiwork of contemporaneous men is presented in art galleries.

More awkward still is the bald fact that artmaking in Canada does not go back a few hundred years, but untold thousands. We cannot simply dismiss this fact by calling it so much Indigenous pre-history lost in time, reducing the finest examples of continuous Aboriginal culture to the status of ethnographic material, irrelevant to the purposes of art. Nor should we accept the old-school anthropological argument that art is a recent Western invention without legitimate application to non-Western peoples. Genetics is even more recent but no one claims that geneticists invented our genes. And the scarcity of Indigenous art historians proves nothing more than unjustified neglect.

It is true that the once-superior Indigenous populations were ravaged into a small minority by the consequences of contact and colonization. It is true that their unique cultures and languages were devastated by the racism and ignorance of the settlers. The survival in Canada of Indigenous peoples, along with their cultural distinction, is a miracle that we should all hail with great relief, while forever regretting what has been lost. We must acknowledge the work of Indigenous artists past and present from across this land, makers of a living culture with universal relevance. The rich and complex Canadian scene that benefits us all, indeed that helps define us, would be unthinkable without the constant presence of Indigenous art. It must be celebrated in the pantheon of Canadian artistic genius.

In every material expression of human culture there are typical examples, and a handful of exceptional examples, that emerge from larger pools of objects. With their different missions, museums of ethnography are interested in the typical; art museums were created to honour the extraordinary. Not only do the arguments for separating the Indigenous art made in Canada from the notion of "Canadian art" smell quite musty, in my opinion they also reveal misunderstanding about the point of artmaking, identical in both cases. Moreover, they grudge the plain and easily demonstrated fact that some things, typically the products of surpassing concentration and experience, exhibit more emotional power, more refinement and consequently more beauty than other things like them. For me, such power needs hardly any context to be keenly felt.

Perpetuating the typological hierarchies of art history and the segregationist taxonomies of anthropology masks a bias against women in the first case, and against Indigenous excellence in the second. It also disconnects too many fine artists of the present from the heritage that would illuminate their work, especially in its non-traditional manifestations where links to the past are less obvious. Unfairly, this leaves them at an interpretive disadvantage and shades their brilliance.

No matter our origin or our gender, the aesthetic instinct at the root of art is the source of the empowering human perspective that helped us prosper as a species against long odds. Conveniently, it translated the bewildering mass of natural phenomena into intelligible concepts that could be expressed in shapes and symbols, patterns and pictures. Unlike science, we did not start out making art to help us understand the world; we used it to invent a world that we could understand.

Art belongs to the set of tools we humans have used to communicate, to persuade and even to dominate each other; a vehicle for myths and histories, symbols and information; an instrument of both enculturation and socialization used to build strong, centralized, coherent communities; a means to achieve collective and personal confidence. Without art, we could not have created the human sphere

*that has now overtaken our global habitat, and we will need it to survive our increasingly anxious triumph. From this view, the difference in the use of art, artifice and decoration between the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans who first encountered each other here so long ago can seem superficial.*

*In art, however, surface is everything. If their differences are superficial from a philosophical remove, few things could be more dissimilar than the surfaces of the land's autochthonous cultures and those of the European artistic traditions that took root here four centuries ago. The will to elegant stylization governed the former, while the latter honed shifting conventions of verisimilitude. The first valued a prudent stability of forms, whereas each succeeding generation of the other sought its own. The Indigenous aesthetic focus was on the body facing the world, an outward-looking ritual of human distinction endlessly rehearsing its integration with nature. With an ethos rooted in sustainability, the First Peoples decorated themselves and their things to charm animal spirits by honouring them with the courtesy of beauty. On the other hand, the first European settlers brought inward-looking customs, decorating not so much themselves as the gilded refuges they built against a nature that they hastened to subdue and to spiritually escape; their ethos was anchored in the construction and expansion of an artificial habitat of total control, inspired by a "heavenly Jerusalem." For Indigenous peoples, what Europeans called a "wilderness" was, in fact, the bountiful and mystical realm that constitutes the world: "What wilderness?!"*

*Incompatibility is the gist of this long story; would that complementarity had guided us instead. Despite their stark asymmetries, to understand Canada one needs to know both of these cultures, their differences and their influence on each other, the inclusion of many other cultures over time, and where we are now. From the perspective of a long-established cultural institution that should provide such understanding, this is easier said than done, but it is high time we broadened our perspective (Mayer 2017).*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 1.6

Go back and undertake a close reading of this excerpt from Marc Mayer's essay. What are some of the key ideas and arguments that Mayer is making here? What ideas or aspects were unfamiliar to you or did you not understand? What questions do you have about this text? At the end of this course it may be useful to come back to these questions and reflect upon your response to this essay: has your understanding of it changed?

## Judging a book by its table of contents

You may have heard the idiom "don't judge a book by its cover." It's a cautionary phrase that encourages us not to judge the worth of something by its outward appearance. But, what about judging a book by its table of contents? A table of contents is found at the start of most reference books and textbooks, and provides a handy way for readers to navigate quickly to a certain part of a book. Unlike a book's cover, however, the table of contents is the first indication of the way knowledge, ideas, and history is ordered by the author of a book. It can provide some clues, even before reading the preface or introduction, as to what the book is about and how a particular subject is categorized, thought about, and organized.

Most university subjects – chemistry, math, history, political science, art history and Canadian art history, for

example – often rely on textbooks to introduce students to the broad strokes of the subject. In a mathematics textbook a student would be introduced to concepts and skills that slowly build on one another throughout the text. The table of contents might indicate that first you need to know about addition, before moving on to multiplication, and then finally to algebra. A history textbook might suggest to a student that they first need to know about what happened in 1841 before they can move on to learning about what happened in 1867 (in Canada that would be the Act of the Union followed by Confederation). For the purposes of introducing an entire subject to students this can be convenient, but in doing so textbooks can sometimes oversimplify information into firm categories, or at their worst exclude certain histories that might not conveniently fit into the neat categories set out by the table of contents.

In the study of Canadian art history, there have been a handful of textbooks that have been relied upon by instructors to teach students, some of which were written as early as the 1960s, that continue to be used today. Looking at the table of contents of some of these key texts can reveal aspects of the history of Canadian art history as a field of study. This history of history is called historiography. Historiography tells us who was writing about something, and when and why were they doing it. It also helps us to see the biases and subjectivities in historical thinking and writing at a given moment in time.

Judging a book by its table of contents is a good exercise in practicing historiography. For example, what might be revealed to you if a textbook has a single author versus a series of authors? Or, what is revealed when an author starts their history at a particular date or focuses on a particular place? In art history, you might also consider what type of art forms and which artists are being written about. In answering these questions you might consider aspects of gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, culture, and colonialism.

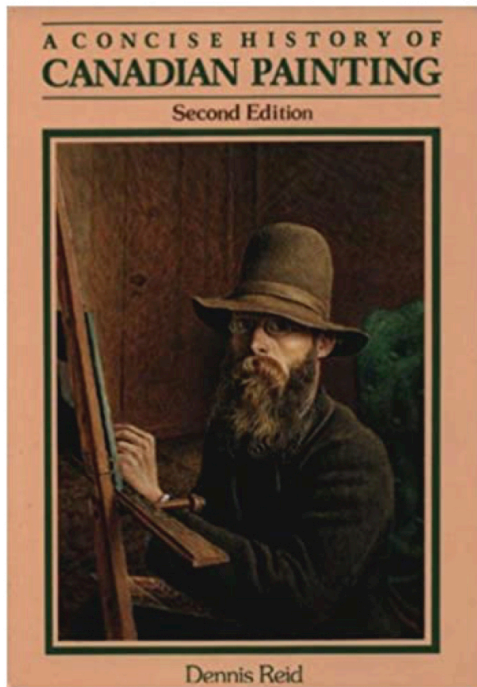
#### LEARNING JOURNAL 1.7

Take a close look at the table of contents from two texts often considered “foundational” to the history of art in Canada:

Dennis Reid. *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*. Second edition (first published in 1973). Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

J. Russell Harper. *Painting in Canada: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

## Contents



|  |      |
|--|------|
| Colour Plates  | vi   |
| Abbreviations  | viii |
| Preface to the First Edition   | ix   |
| Preface to the Second Edition  | xi   |
| 1. Painting in New France 1665–1760                                      | 1    |
| 2. Painting in British North America 1760–1860                           | 18   |
| 3. French-speaking Artists in Montreal 1785–1830 and<br>Quebec 1820–1860 | 38   |
| 4. Paul Kane and Cornelius Krieghoff 1845–1865                           | 50   |
| 5. English Immigrant Artists in Canada West 1850–1870                    | 67   |
| 6. Landscape Painters in Montreal and Toronto 1860–1890                  | 78   |
| 7. The ‘French’ Period in Canadian Art 1880–1915                         | 91   |
| 8. Homer Watson and Ozias Leduc 1880–1930                                | 106  |
| 9. The Canadian Art Club 1907–1915                                       | 119  |
| 10. Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven 1913–1931                         | 138  |
| 11. Emily Carr, LeMoine FitzGerald, and David Milne 1912–1950            | 156  |
| 12. The Canadian Group of Painters                                       | 177  |
| 13. John Lyman and the Contemporary Art Society 1939–1948                | 202  |
| 14. Paul-Émile Borduas and Les Automatistes 1946–1960                    | 226  |
| 15. Painters Eleven 1953–1960  | 247  |
| 16. A Continuing Tradition 1955–1965                                     | 273  |
| 17. The Death and Rebirth of Painting 1965–1980                          | 315  |
| Acknowledgements   | 399  |
| Index  | 401  |



PART ONE: THE FRENCH COLONY 1665-1759

- 1 / The Age of Laval / 3
- 2 / Votive Painting in New France / 14
- 3 / Local Painters in New France / 19
- 4 / Early painting in British North America / 26
- Illustrations / 31

PART TWO: THE ENGLISH COLONIAL PERIOD 1759-1867

- 5 / The Aftermath of the Seven Years' War / 43
- 6 / British Army Topographers in Eastern Canada / 47
- 7 / The Golden Age in Quebec: The Beginning / 56
- 8 / The Golden Age in Quebec: Maturity / 68
- 9 / Along the Atlantic Seaboard / 81
- 10 / Portraits for the Masses / 91
- 11 / Krieghoff and Genre in Quebec / 97
- 12 / Pre-Confederation Years in Ontario / 107
- 13 / The Lure of the West / 118
- 14 / The Last Frozen Barrier / 131
- Illustrations / 137

PART THREE: THE NEW DOMINION 1867-1910

- 15 / Art in the New Dominion / 179
- 16 / The British Tradition at Confederation / 188
- 17 / A New Search for Canada / 193
- 18 / The Dignity of Labour / 201
- 19 / French Academic Influences / 209
- 20 / Contrasts in Quebec / 219
- 21 / Painting as an Aesthetic Experience / 225
- Illustrations / 239

PART FOUR: NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM AFTER 1910

- 22 / Nationalism and the 'Group' / 263
- 23 / Contemporaries of the 'Group' / 290
- 24 / Regionalism in the Thirties / 304
- 25 / Transformation in the West / 314
- 26 / Towards Non-Objectivity: Beginnings / 321
- 27 / Reawakening in Montreal / 330
- 28 / Anglophone Revolt in the Fifties / 345
- Illustrations / 357

## Painting in Canada: a history

J. RUSSELL HARPER / Second edition



Respond in point form to the following questions:

Who is writing the text (a single author, many authors)?

When is the text written and what was happening in Canada when the text was produced?

How is the information organized (chronologically, alphabetically, geographically, by medium, by style, by gender)?

Now that you've thought about what is included, think about what is excluded. Are there particular forms of art, places, or people that are not mentioned?

Lastly, start thinking about what your answers to the above questions reveal to you about the history of Canadian art history (historiography). Are there biases within the study of art history? Are there problems with continuing to use these texts as the core textbook of a Canadian art history course? What might you suggest could be more useful course readings?

## Slow and close looking

One of the fascinating aspects of art historical inquiry is translating what you see with your eyes, and experience with your senses or your body, into written text. This process of formal visual description leads to analysis and is a key source of evidence for making arguments about works of art and material culture. Dr. Robert Glass writes,

*Art historians use visual analysis to describe and understand this experience. Often called formal analysis because it focuses on form rather than subject matter or historical context, this typically consists of two parts: description of the visual features of a work and analysis of their effects. To describe visual properties systematically, art historians rely on an established set of terms and concepts. These include characteristics such as format, scale, composition, and viewpoint; treatment of the human figure and space; and the use of form, line, color, light, and texture.*

*In describing visual qualities, formal analysis usually identifies certain features as contributing to the overall impression of the work. For example, a prominent linear form might suggest strength if straight and vertical, grace or sensuality if sinuous, or stability and calm if long and horizontal. Sharp contrasts in light and dark may make an image feel bold and dramatic whereas subdued lighting might suggest gentleness or intimacy. In the past, formal analysis assumed there was some elementary level of universality in the human response to visual form and tried to describe these effects. Today, the method is understood as more subjective, but still valued as a critical exercise and means of analyzing visual experience, especially in introductory art history courses (2017).*

Watch the Smarthistory video "How to do visual (formal) analysis" (~10min) here to get you started:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=3#oembed-5>

One of the most important skills you will develop in this course is the ability to look at and describe art and material culture using art historical language, terminology, and methodology. In this section we outline how



you can approach doing this. Visual formal analysis requires close looking over an extended period of time. According to the Tate Modern:

*Studies have found that visitors to art galleries spend an average of eight seconds looking at each work on display.*

*But what happens when we spend five minutes, fifteen minutes, an hour or an afternoon really looking in detail at an artwork? This is 'slow looking'. It is an approach based on the idea that, if we really want to get to know a work of art, we need to spend time with it.*

*Slow looking is not about curators, historians or even artists telling you how you should look at art. It's about you and the artwork, allowing yourself time to make your own discoveries and form a more personal connection with it (Tate).*

The longer you look the more you begin to see. What do you see after 10 minutes? Or 30 minutes? Or more?

Here are a few tips for slow and close looking which may be helpful:

- **Make yourself comfortable.** Find a place, bench, stool or space on the floor that gives you a good view of the work. Feel free to stand or move around the artwork, to explore different perspectives.
- **Don't worry if nothing comes to mind at first. Be patient.** Try focusing your attention on a particular detail. Try to forget any expectations, as well as anything you 'know' about the artwork. Keep an open mind. If you are still struggling, consider one of the following themes as an entry point: texture, colour, shape, symbols, story, perspective.
- **Trust in your own authority and intuition.** Pay attention to your first impressions. Don't underestimate the reason why you were drawn to the work in the first place.
- **Let your eyes wander.** Your mind will try and make connections between elements of the work. These connections might be intended by the artist, or unique to you. It doesn't matter; both are valid. See things from a fresh perspective. Make the familiar strange. Try to spot the details hiding in plain view.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Don't try too hard to shut out what is going on around you. Don't be put off by those squeaky shoes or the sound of visitors chatting; this is part of the fun of slow looking.
- **How do you feel?** Pay attention to how your mind and body respond. This might be in a subtle way. Does the art help you feel calm, does it irritate you, excite you? Does it trigger any memories?
- **Share your findings.** How do you feel about this artwork now you have studied it in detail? Try to summarize your thoughts. This could be in your head, with your friends, or with the strangers looking at the artwork with you.
- **Look again.** Try a different artwork, the same artwork, straight away, after a coffee break, on a different day. How does it look in other conditions: on a rainy day, on a bad hair day, on your birthday? (Tate)

In this video, Melissa Smith, Assistant Curator of Community Programs at the Art Gallery of Ontario, demonstrates close looking by examining a work by Canadian painter Yvonne McKague Housser:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=3#oembed-6>

If you are interested, Smith has another video here in which she demonstrates close looking.

1. Select one artwork from the list below. Search for a full colour reproduction available online.
  - Ozias Leduc, *Still Life with Lay Figure* (1898)
  - Annie Pootoogook, *Cape Dorset Freezer* (2005)
  - Prudence Heward, *Rollande* (1929)
  - Bertram Brooker, *Sounds Assembling* (1928)
  - Liz Magor, *Chee-to* (2000)
  - Rita Letendre, *Atara* (1963)
  - William Berczy, *The Woolsey Family* (1809)
  - Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *The Impending Nisga'a' Deal. Last Stand. Chump Change* (1996)
  - Dana Claxton, *Headdress-Jeneen* (2018)
  - Suzy Lake, *Suzy Lake as Gilles Gheerbrandt* (1974)
2. Set a timer and spend 10 minutes looking closely at the image.
3. Make a rough sketch of the artwork. This forces you to look closely and help you understand the visual logic, various components, and content of the image.
4. Formally analyze the work. Make note of what you see, when you ask:
  - What are the defining features of the compositional design?
  - What is the arrangement of colour, line, shape, and texture?
  - What is the artist's chosen media (oil paint, stone, sound, bronze, fabric, etc.?)
  - What is the content of the image? Is it figurative? Abstract? What is being depicted?
5. Consider other information easily available. Who is the artist? What is the title of the artwork? Was it given by the artist? Or a museum at a later date? What is the date of the work? Do you know any other artists or artworks from that periods you can connect it to? Does it remind you of any other artworks you have seen, from any time period?
6. Reflect on your response. Does the work incite an emotion? Does the image remind you of something, or jog a memory?
7. Are you able to interpret and make an argument about the artwork based on everything you have observed and considered so far? Your interpretation of the artwork should be based on an appreciation of the combined forces of form, style, and subject matter/content, together with a consideration of when the work was made. How do you make meaning from this image or object?
8. Summarize your response in 500 words.

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# KNOWING



Figure 2.1 Christi Belcourt, *My Heart is Beautiful*, 2014. Acrylic on Canvas, approx. 2.74 x 3.65 m. Collection of the Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatoon. Courtesy Christi Belcourt. This artwork cannot be altered to radically change any aspect of it that would result in a distortion of the work that would no longer be recognizable from the original.

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, “a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation,” uses the sacred plant sweetgrass as a metaphor to explain the origins of plant, animal, and human life, their intertwined respectful and reciprocal relationships, the loss of this reciprocity, and the hope of ecological restoration to return the balance that once was to Mother Earth. She points out that in Western epistemology (the theory of knowledge), there has been a historic recognition of a hierarchy of beings with humans at the top, the pinnacle of evolution, the darling of Creation, and plants at the very bottom. In Indigenous ways of knowing, however, humans “are often referred to as ‘the younger brothers of Creation.’” In other words, Indigenous peoples see human beings as having the least experience in understanding how to live, and thus the most to learn from other species for guidance.

Christi Belcourt is a Michif (Métis) visual artist as well as a community-based artist, environmentalist and advocate for the lands, waters, and Indigenous peoples. Through her paintings, which are made with minute intricate detail in order to resemble floral beadwork designs of Métis women from the early 1800s, Belcourt addresses the relationship between human life and the natural world through the concept of interconnectedness. The flora and fauna detailed in her paintings not only convey the interconnectedness of ecological life, but also the ways in which humans are a part of a delicate balance—learning, receiving, contributing, and depending on the interconnected relationships of all living things. Belcourt’s works also acknowledge the ways these relationships are transmitted across time. Her work draws knowledge gained through thousands of years of human relationships with the ecologies around them. Belcourt’s adaptation of traditional beadwork into painting interconnects knowledge and practice with contemporary indigenous art.

Christi Belcourt’s remarks on her practice:

*All my medicine-picking places are in my head on a map that only I will ever know. I sit in these places, taking them in. The earth is my government. It’s my church and place of worship. I watch the way the*

*sun dances on the leaves. And try to memorize the smell of the earth and the feeling of my knees getting wet, as I kneel digging for roots with my hands.*

*As I breathe in and out, so too does the earth. My chest heaving as the tides, ebbing and flowing, giving and taking. The water that runs into and through my body has existed on this planet since the beginning of time. The water that runs through our veins in our blood ran through our ancestors' veins, and has existed on this planet since the beginning of time. Water has no flag. It has no allegiance. It holds life in its embrace as a baby floats in a woman, and through it we are connected, all of us, to each other and to everything in this universe. Water is medicine.*

*This earth is alive. She breathes. She moves. She changes. She is constantly renewing herself* (Belcourt 2020, 15).

Like the paintings themselves, Belcourt shares her deep connectedness to the world around her through her activist work, such as *Walking With Our Sisters*, a community-driven project that honours murdered or missing Indigenous women and *Giniigaaniimenaaning (Looking Ahead)* that commemorates residential school survivors, as well as in publication such as her 2007 book *Medicines to Help Us*. Watch this video of Belcourt discussing her painting *My Heart is Beautiful* (2010), in which she not only describes the interconnectedness of the elements of the painting, but their connection to history, human life, and the artist herself:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=128#oembed-1>

## LEARNING JOURNAL 2.1

Go outside, on your street or in your backyard if you have one, or even look around your own home. How many plants can you name? If you don't really recognize many or any plants, consider what this tells you about your relationship to the natural world and your environment. Think about how you have or might obtain knowledge about a particular plant: By asking someone? Who? By looking in a book or online? Which one? By looking at what surrounds the plant? By describing it or drawing it? Take a moment to go through and write down your own knowledge process in learning about something from the environment and ecology in which you are interconnected.

## By the end of this module you will be able to:

- explain differences between Indigenous and Western epistemologies and their relationship to art history
- describe how knowledge identifies, categorizes, and creates relationships
- analyze the form, content, and context of key artworks
- articulate the role that art history as a discipline, and the institution of the museum, have played in producing knowledge
- become familiar with the terminology around Indigenous peoples.

## It should take you:

**My Heart Is Beautiful** Text 7 min, Video 11 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**Visualizing knowledge** Text 90 min

**“There is no word for art in my language”** Text 70 min, Video 3 min

**The erasure of knowledge, revival and resistance** Text 90 min, Video 130 min

**Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit** Text 30 min

**Learning journals** 8 x 20 = 160 min

**Total: approximately 8.5 hours**

## Key works:

- Fig. 2.1 Christi Belcourt, *My Heart Is Beautiful* (2014)
- Fig. 2.2 Cartier's Map (1534)
- Fig. 2.3 Champlain's Map (1632)
- Fig. 2.4 Anonymous, *La France Apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France* (c. 1670)
- Louis Nicolas, *Codex Canadensis* (c. 1700)
- Fig. 2.5 Benjamin F. Baltzly, *Cascade on the Garnet River, North Thompson River, BC* (1871)
- Fig. 2.6 *The Exhibition of Northwest Coast: Native and Modern* (1927)
- Fig. 2.7 Frederick Alexcee, *A Fight Between the Haida and the Tsimshian, Port Simpson* (c.1896)
- *The Spirit Sings* (1988) and Carl Beam, *The North American Iceberg* (1986)
- Fig. 2.8 Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *The Lesson* (1989)
- Trevor Mack and Tailor Blais, *Clouds of Autumn* (2015)
- Carey Newman, *The Witness Blanket* (2015)
- Fig. 2.9 Adrian Stimson, *Sick and Tired* (2004)
- Fig. 2.10 Annie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed* (2006)
- Fig. 2.11 David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Division of Meat* (1996)

## Visualizing knowledge

Indigenous peoples have learned and shared their knowledge of land and place—knowledge addressed in Belcourt's paintings—over the thousands of years of Indigenous presence in the country now known as Canada. When the first European settlers arrived on this land they relied on Indigenous knowledge, as well as Christian doctrine and philosophy, and European modes of knowledge-creation such as mapping, numbering, and inventorying, to produce a sense of the place.

If you climb the mountain in the middle of the city of Montreal today you may come across a plaque that reads: “On October 2nd, 1535, Jacques Cartier, discoverer of Canada, climbed this mountain under the guidance of the Iroquois of Hochelaga, and, impressed with the beauty of the landscape before his eyes, gave it the name of Mount Royal, from which the city of Montreal took its name.”

Even in this short inscription we see several assumptions implicit in European knowledge: that Cartier is the discoverer, which implies that knowledge of the land begins with European arrival; that the land's beauty is what ascribes value to place above other characteristics; and that geo-politically the land was to be known as claimed and territorialized for France and its leader King Francis I.

These aspects of knowledge were visually manifested in maps. Cartier was the first European to describe

and map the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and the shores of the Saint Lawrence River. European emphasis on the accumulation and recording of knowledge through text and visual description over other forms of knowledge-keeping, such as oral histories, means that there are a significant number of European objects that survive from Cartier onward. This is quite different from the way histories were reproduced and sustained in Indigenous cultures. Throughout history, Indigenous societies in North America relied on the oral transmission of stories, histories, and lessons to maintain a historical record and preserve their identities and cultures. Western epistemology has prioritized the written word as the dominant form of record-keeping until recently. European settlers generally considered oral societies to be peoples without history because they did not record it in written form. Indigenous peoples have fought hard to challenge this idea and we know this not to be true.

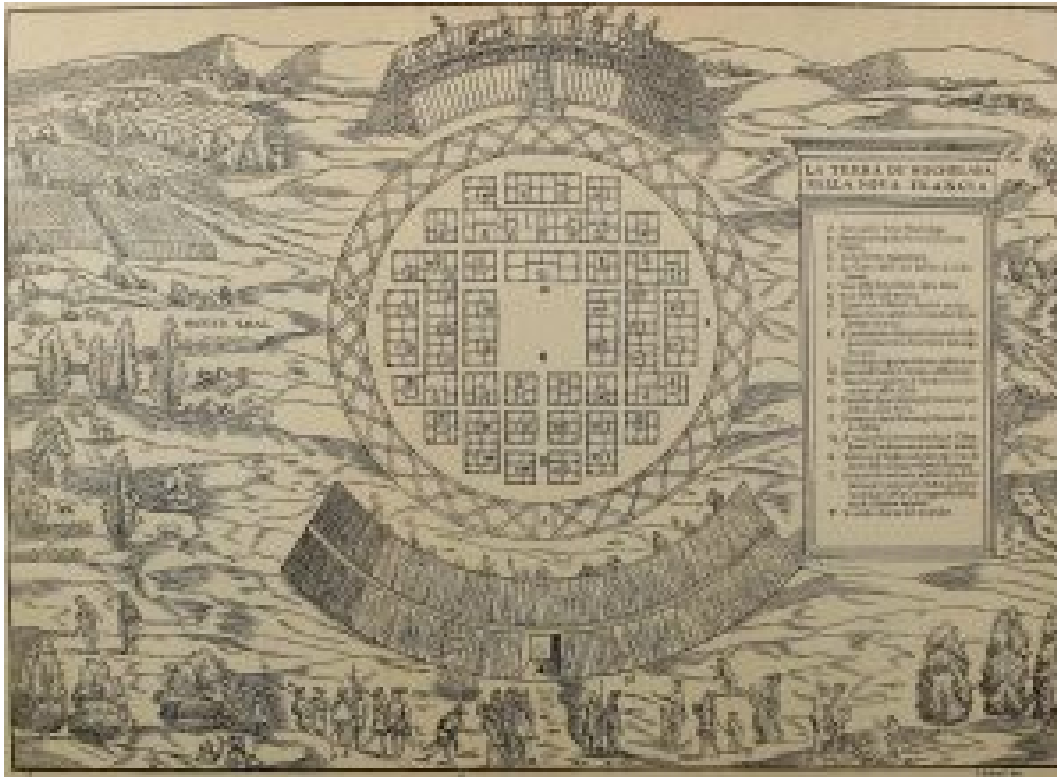


Figure 2.2 Jacques Cartier, *La terra de Hochelaga nella Nova Francia*, 1534. map from *A Memoir of Jacques Cartier, Sieur de Limoilou – His Voyages to the St. Lawrence*. A bibliography and a facsimile of the manuscript of 1534, with annotations (1906). Robarts Library, University of Toronto.

Have a look at Cartier's map of the Iroquois village of Hochelaga from 1565, which may have been located atop what is now Mount Royal in Montreal, though no archeological evidence has been found of such a village. The woodcut engraving was published by Giovanni Battista Ramusio of Venice and was the first printed map of a settlement in North America. Here we see European visual sensibilities trying to make sense of the village, which in its mapping looks more like a utopian Renaissance city than what archeological findings suggest Iroquois villages of this time looked like. However, while this image is nothing like the maps you might be used to, it is in its own way descriptive.

Seventy years after Cartier's arrival in 1611, Samuel de Champlain sailed from France across the Atlantic Ocean and along the Saint Lawrence River with the hope of establishing a fur-trading post on the Island of Montreal. His plan was to establish a trading post at the most westerly point he could reach, to ensure that any fur trading would occur at his post first. He also sought relationships with people of the Wyandot (also known as the Huron, part of the Iroquois), as a way to obtain crucial knowledge about the land and to foster economic relationships. Indigenous knowledge was understood by the French, including Champlain, as being inferior, but fundamentally equipped to deal with the climate of this "new" land. The French were eager to learn Indigenous knowledge of flora and fauna, canoes, hunting, and dress because it was advantageous to do so, a question



of survival. In return, Champlain shared European knowledge and technology, namely weaponry, that would provide an advantage in the ongoing Iroquois Wars.



*Figure 2.3 Samuel Champlain (cartographer), Richard H. Pease (lithographer), Champlain's Map of New France, 1632. 23 x 46 cm. The New York Public Library Digital Collections.*

In addition to establishing a strong fur trade through economic and military alliances, Champlain also, like Cartier before him, made maps. Here we have a map made in 1632 that was a visual consolidation of what was known about New France at the time. The knowledge described on this map comes in part from Champlain's own experience, but also relied heavily on information he was given by Indigenous traders. The result is a map that gives representation to European understandings of the land west of Montreal shown for the first time, but not necessarily visited by Champlain himself.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.2

What are Cartier's and Champlain's maps trying to describe and represent? Consider the visual tools they use: scale (are things the size they are supposed to be, and how large are they in relation to one another?); perspective (from above, from eye level); symbols (indicators of direction or cues that indicate a particular feature); details, designs, labels. How is it different from a map that you might use today? How is it the same? What do your observations tell you about map-making in this particular historical moment and context?

In 1615, Champlain returned and brought with him ambitions beyond economic trade and business. He took with him Jesuit missionaries. While these missionaries' purpose was to convert Indigenous people to the Christian religion, their arrival also marked the beginning of an enduring process of deliberate colonial erasure of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.

Many of the priests and missionaries were trained in various skills, including painting, in addition to their religious training. Painting, specifically religious painting, thus marked a new form of European visual output in Canada. In addition to maps, with the arrival of religious missionaries there was a proliferation of paintings with religious subject matter, executed in European styles such as French Baroque. These religious artworks borrowed from European styles to interpret new places, people, and circumstances.

The painter of *La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France* is anonymous, though the work is usually attributed to a painter named Frère Luc who was a member of the Récollets, a branch of the Franciscan religious missionaries. Frère Luc, whose name is a nod to the Patron Saint of Painters, was trained in Europe and a colleague of painters such as the famed French artist, Nicolas Poussin. He is credited for this work because he was really the only painter in New France at this time who had this degree of skill.



Figure 2.4 Anonymous (attributed to Frère Luc), *La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France*, c. 1670. Oil on canvas, 229.5 x 229.5 cm. Collection of the Monastère des Ursulines de Québec, Québec City. Centre de conservation Québec.

While one might think that this work was commissioned by settlers, or the religious community of the Jesuit Chapel in Quebec City in which it was originally installed, art historian Dennis Reid has suggested that was the Hurons who donated the painting to the Jesuits, in 1666, on the occasion of the feast of the Holy Trinity. He writes,

*Surviving records document the desire of the Huron of Quebec in 1666 to commission a painting for the Jesuit church in order to commemorate their conversion to Christianity, a process that had begun with*

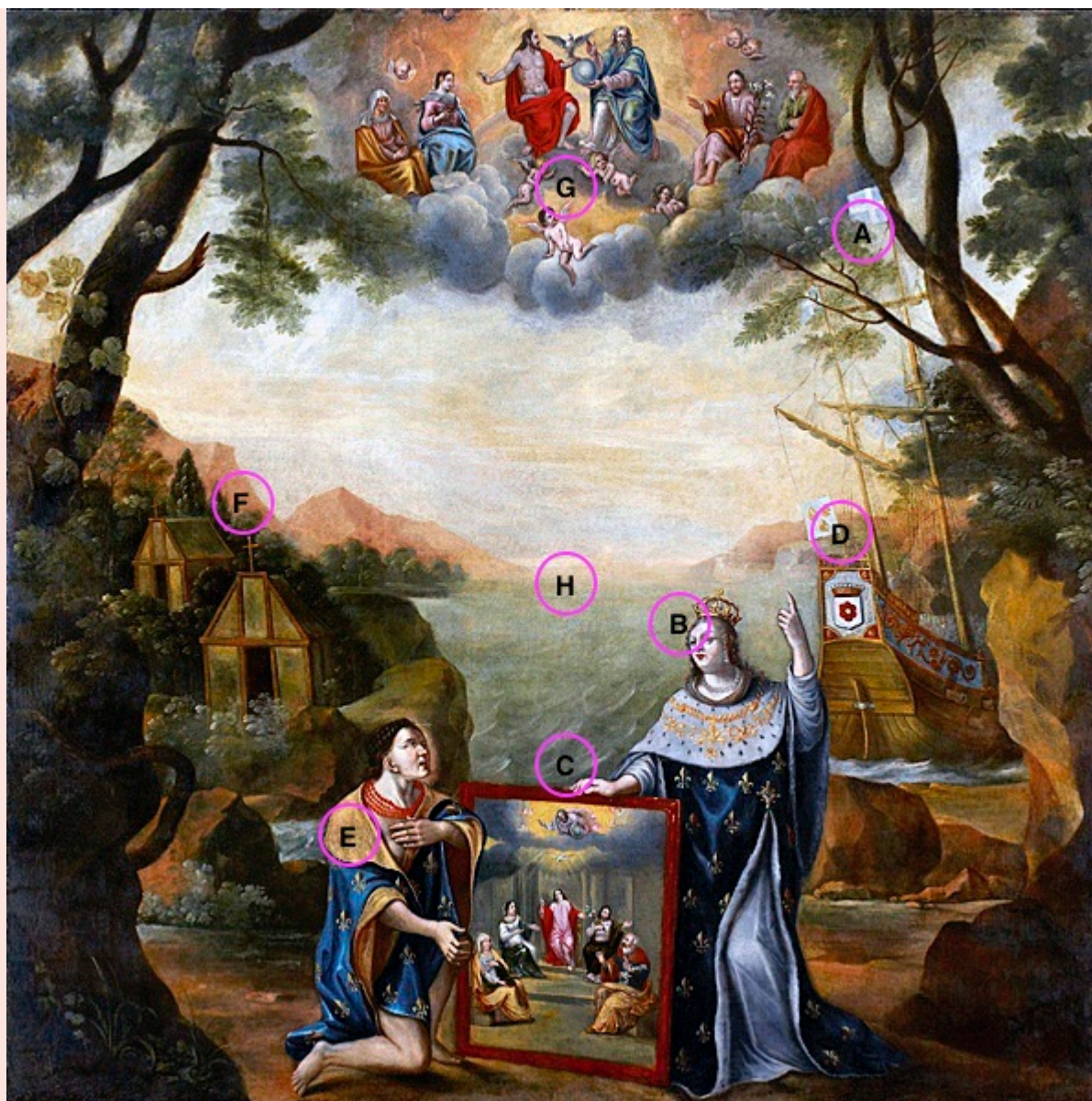
*the Jesuit Jean de Brébeuf's first trip to Huronia in 1629, the year that de Bruc's ships first began to arrive at Quebec with goods to trade for furs (Reid 2021, 4).*

The painting brings together religious, colonial, and Indigenous subjects for what was likely the purpose of commemorating a particular event: the Hurons' conversion to Christianity. But it does much more than this. The visual components are all carefully planned, arranged, and invested with literal or symbolic meaning. Together, they tell a much larger story about the role of religious conversion in the colonial context. This is a story about the ways in which Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing were fundamentally changed in the colonial process. The visual work itself is also a form of knowledge, in that it can be read in the same way one would read a text.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.3

*La France Apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France* tells the story of an exchange of knowledge, but it is also a form of knowledge-keeping of this historical event. Let's read it for ourselves by matching the letters on the artwork with the numbered descriptions below of what is happening. This process of understanding an artwork through its visual elements is called visual analysis.

1. The fleur-de-lis French flag is flying high in the sky, almost as high as the heavens themselves.
  2. Queen Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV of France, symbolising France's right to rule. She has one hand on the painting, and one hand pointing pointing to the heavens, signifying authority.
  3. France appears to be teaching Christianity with the help of a painting of the holy family, thus colonizing New France and converting the Huron.
  4. The ship links exploration, colonial settlement, and commerce with colonization.
  5. A Huron man kneeling on the left represents the colonial concept of the "noble savage" or "other" who has not been "corrupted" by civilization, and therefore symbolises humanity's innate goodness; by kneeling, he is also submitting to God.
  6. The buildings are Huron houses, which situate the painting's location in New France. The crosses on the houses signify Huron religious conversion.
  7. In the clouds at the top are the Christian figures of God, Jesus, and the Holy Family. God is handing the world to Jesus, who in turn hands it to France, suggesting France has the right to colonize.
  8. The image is geographically situated along the St. Lawrence River.
- Are there any other symbols that you see that might add to the narrative in the painting?



Pictorial representations from New France in the 1600s are extremely rare as many have been lost or destroyed. One of the few visual works to survive from this period was produced by a Jesuit missionary named Louis Nicolas who traveled extensively throughout New France. It takes the form of a 79-page book entitled the *Codex Canadensis*, which includes 53 plates with a myriad of descriptive drawings, including 18 of plants, 67 of mammals, 56 of birds, 33 of fish, and about ten images of reptiles, batrachians, and insects done in either pen and ink or watercolour. In addition, a large number of sketches and drawings in the book depict objects made by Indigenous people that Louis Nicolas encountered.

In 2011, art historian François-Marc Gagnon published a volume that reproduced the pages of the *Codex* along with translations of Nicolas's writings from Latin into French and English, making a fragile archival document widely available. The *Codex* provides historians, art historians, and scientists with a significant resource about the ecology of the 17th century through visual description. This type of scientific recording came to be known as naturalist study, a pursuit of both amateurs and professionals that encouraged knowing through seeing, recording, and organizing, and it remains a prominent method of recording in environmental, botanical, and



biological fieldwork today. In his discussion on science and visual representation and Louis Nicholas's *Codex Canadensis*, Gagnon explains:

*Who, then, was Louis Nicolas? The least we can say is that he was not your ordinary Jesuit. For instance, we learn from folio 73 of the "Histoire naturelle" that he succeeded in taming two bears and having them perform circus tricks on the ground of the Sillery residence of the Jesuits near Quebec. We are also told that his colleagues complained about it—which seems understandable! (Gagnon 2011, 10)*

*...The seventeenth century saw a major transformation in natural history as a literary genre. Until then, the principal interest of ancient naturalists had been to find similarities between things, in the hope that these similarities would reveal their true utility to man. But in the seventeenth century this utilitarian approach began to be criticized. The usefulness of nature was of much less interest to the cognoscenti, who now strove for a more objective view of the world around them, in the hope that it could be presented in a "tableau" where each thing could find its place, revealing the order to be found in nature. As a consequence, looking for similarities was less crucial and new treatises on natural history attempted to discourage the earlier mode of knowledge by analogy, mocking the authors who were still attached to it (Gagnon 2011, 30).*

*...The material that Nicolas had to present was abundant, even unruly, and he needed to organize it one way or another. As we shall see, his classification system is not based on any preconceived idea of the order of nature that taxonomy ought to reflect. On the contrary, he starts from analogies and thinks that one has to group similar things together (Gagnon 2011, 54).*

Gagnon is thinking about the ways in which Nicholas was classifying, categorizing, and arranging the world he encountered, and the ways that knowledge was being created and organized by Europeans in the 17th century. Nicolas' approach fits with the religious and anthropocentric view of nature that was prevalent during his lifetime in which every creature was made by God as a resource for humanity. For instance, the glands of the beaver (the castoreum) were seen as producing a substance that is useful to people rather than for marking the animal's territory (Gagnon 2011, 359). As we look at the *Codex*, we need to be aware of the biases and limitations with which it was created, but it can also be an extraordinary entry point into learning about the historical moment in which it was created.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.4

The *Codex* exists in the collection of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, United States. The Gilcrease Institute has digitized the document. Spend some time moving through the pages. What plants and animals do you recognize? Would you say the *Codex* is a work of art? A document? Or both?

The idea of knowing through visual representation that we see in the *Codex Canadensis* played an important role in the colonial processes that took place across what is now Canada throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. As plants, animals, land, and even people were recorded through settler initiatives such as topographical and geological surveys, mapping, and census taking, the information gathered was understood as a form of possession: to see is to know, and to know is to control. Art and visual culture were central components to the early colonization of Canada, stretching over hundreds of years since Europeans first set foot on North American soil. Colonization refers to the process of assuming control of someone else's territory

and applying one's own systems of knowledge, law, government, and religion. Settlement and colonization was scattered and largely confined to the eastern parts of Canada up until the 19th century, when European expansion to the West, the discovery of gold (which overtook the fur trade which was in decline by the 1850s), and the increasing resource extraction including mining, forestry, and fishing that emerged in this period led to the establishment of new colonial centres and processes. As settlers' increasing encroachment on the land, resources, and ways of life of Indigenous peoples had devastating effects, the effects of this colonial expansion—growing populations, increased economic development, and the need for transportation infrastructure and resource management—eventually led to Canadian Confederation in 1867.

With Confederation, people were trying to come to terms with what Canada was, and visual representation came to play an important role in the formation of the emerging Canadian nation-state. The land was a central focus for settlers' coming to terms with their new place, and an utterly vital aspect of life, identity, and culture for Indigenous peoples for millennia prior to colonial encounter. The features of the land—the Rocky Mountains, the sprawling prairies, the Canadian shield, the Laurentian mountains, and the Fundy waterways and inlets—came to be a powerful representation of Canada, intimately linked to a sense of Canadian identity. In the very same historical moment, the emergence of photography in 1839 provided an unparalleled way of visually representing the land. Photography was quickly absorbed into the same professional and amateur naturalist pursuits that we see in the *Codex Canadensis*, produced as documentation on government surveys and collected into photographic albums. Photographs were also used as source material for painters and included in art exhibitions in their own right. Lastly, photography became a commodity. Newly established photographic studios were eager to capitalize on the popular desire of citizens to see the faraway landscapes and fascinating vistas of their new nation.



Figure 2.5 Benjamin F. Baltzly, *Cascade on the Garnet River, North Thompson River, BC, 1871*. Silver salts on glass, wet collodion process, 25 x 20 cm. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Consider the photographs produced by photographer Benjamin Baltzly on his 1871 expedition with the Geological Survey of Canada through the Rocky Mountains. The resulting body of photographs he produced were used by geologist Alfred R. C. Selwyn in documentation of the expedition, but they were also widely distributed to the public through the famous and prolific photographic studio of William Notman, where Baltzly was employed, and have found their way into a range of private family photographic albums as they were purchased and circulated from the studio.

In her description of Baltzly's journal writing, Elizabeth Cavaliere describes the tensions between art and documentation in the use of photography in the geological survey:

*In 1871 the Colony of British Columbia entered into Canadian Confederation on the condition that a*

transcontinental railroad be built to connect the extremes of a then nascent and developing Canada. The construction of the railroad was hailed from the beginning as a practical necessity, bringing resources from British Columbia to the east and moving settlers westward. The railroad was also considered to be a hallmark of Canadian expansion and progress; the enormous endeavour of constructing the railroad was the foremost feat and a source of national pride. The first official use of photography in Canadian survey work had taken place just a little over a decade earlier during the 1858 Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition. The photographs taken by Humphrey Lloyd Hime during this expedition set a precedent for Canadian interest in photography as a documentary tool. For engineers, scientists and politicians, photographs had the capacity to show a detailed rendering of the Canadian land as it was in the second half of the nineteenth century. Natural passageways and obstacles could be captured truthfully and scientifically through the apparatus of the camera. This unrivaled ability made the camera an indispensable and indisputable tool in the record-making survey process. But, while the earliest photographs were produced as documentary aids serving only to supplement official government reports, they also became the subject of a growing public interest, providing the first exciting glimpses into the unknown vistas of Canada's most inaccessible places.

Because photography could be both an accurate documentary tool and a means by which to showcase the landscape of a newly unified country to its inhabitants, it could also be understood in terms of mutual benefit. The dual desire for plain description and impressive vistas must have been an important factor in the decision to appoint photographer Benjamin Franklin Baltzly to the 1871 Geological Survey expedition.

The expedition took Baltzly and the GSC party across the continent to San Francisco, California, and then north by boat to Victoria, British Columbia. Between June 28 and December 26, 1871, the party traveled northeast, from Victoria to Yale to Kamloops at the mouth of the North Thompson River, and ultimately along the river to Yellowhead Pass and Tête Jaune Cache. Unfortunately, the team fell short of its goal to reach Jasper House before the winter snowfall with the journey quickly taking a turn for the worse when it encountered impenetrable forests and underbrush, a lack of cut trails, insurmountable mountains, misguided guides, weakening horses, and the onset of winter ice and cold. A detailed account of the route and the deteriorating circumstances of the expedition party's journey, along with details of his own personal reflections of the journey and his photographic work, were recorded by Baltzly in his writings.

With photographs intended to serve both Selwyn and Notman, Baltzly was left in the unenviable position of being a servant to two masters, an obligation of which he was keenly aware throughout the expedition. In addition to concerns about pleasing his superiors, Baltzly also writes about his own motivations and thoughts in producing his photographs. Take, for example, his journal entry for September 28, 1871, in which he describes the Garnet River Cascade with a deep understanding of composition: a sense of proportion and angle in his commentary on the course of the water; a sensitivity to light and dark in his description of the rocks; and an understanding of the overall relationship of the elements he is seeing – water, foliage, rock.

The connections between Baltzly's appreciation for the landscape and his experiences working under the conditions of the survey are revealed when text and image are placed alongside each other. The writings in the journal, read together with the photographs produced during the expedition, provide insight into Baltzly's photographic practice as an intersection of science, nature, and religion (Cavaliere 2014, 16-129).



## “There is no word for art in my language”: how disciplines and institutions produce knowledge

Before we explore the role of art history and museums in producing knowledge about art and visual culture, it is important (and demonstrates respect) to familiarize yourself with appropriate terminology for writing and talking about Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Watch the following CBC News video titled “How to talk about Indigenous people”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=128#oembed-2>

You may also want to read over this terminology resource from Queen’s University which outlines why certain terms are not longer in use. Please note that in this module you may find authors using outdated terminology like “Indian” and “Native;” these terms reflect the language in use when the authors were writing, but you should be aware of current language usage from the resources above.

In the following section you will look at the role that art history as a discipline and the institution of the art museum have played in producing knowledge.

“In the language of the Dineh, there is no word for art. When I learned this, I laughed. I was so relieved. This word, and all that it drags with it, was not necessary.”

—Navajo artist Leatrice Mikkelsen (Mithlo 2012, 113)

As a discipline, art history has historically treated art as if it is universal, found in societies and cultures across the globe; however, there is no globally acceptable definition of art. The word “art,” meaning something visual that is valued for its aesthetic qualities, was not used in this modern sense until the 18th century—so to call the visual and material objects and artifacts of non-Western cultures “art” is problematic. As Carolyn Dean argues:

*In locating art where it was not found prior to our naming it, we risk re-creating societies in the image of the modern West, or rather, in the image of the modern West but just different enough to render them lesser or insufficient, or more primitive. We also risk suggesting that cultures that did not possess the concept of art ought to have and that they somehow benefit in having the concept introduced to (and for) them (Dean 2006, 26).*

Dean has also pointed out that a great deal of what we call art today was not actually made as art. This is the case with early European objects and artifacts. Think of the famous Ghent Altarpiece for example, which was not created as a work of fine art for an art gallery but intended as church decoration. In addition, much of the visual and material culture produced by peoples outside of the West, where the concept of art traditionally did not exist, has now come to be seen as art. Dean writes in the same essay, “Not infrequently (although less frequently than in the past), many of the objects from outside the West that were not made as art are grouped together and called ‘primitive art’” (25).

READ about primitivism and its relationship to art and art history in this essay by Dr. Charles Grant and Dr. Kim Grant on *Smarthistory*.



Figure 2.6 Installation view of Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art: Native and Modern at the National Gallery of Canada, 1927. Carr's *Yan, Q.C.I.*, 1912, is pictured at centre. Reproduced by Art Canada Institute.

The 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern* was mounted at the National Gallery of Canada in 1927 and was the first exhibition in Canada to combine the work of Pacific Coast Indigenous peoples with paintings and sculptures by prominent Euro-Canadian settler artists including Emily Carr, Edwin Holgate, Anne Savage, and Pegi Nicol MacLeod.

Read the following excerpt from the exhibition catalogue for the *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern*. Consider the words used by then-Director of the National Gallery of Canada, Eric Brown. For example, what is implied by the words “more sophisticated” in relation to the art by the Euro-Canadian settler artists, versus the Indigenous visual culture on display?

*The purpose of the Trustees of the National Gallery in arranging this exhibition of West Coast Indian Art combined with the work of a number of Canadian artists who, from the days of Paul Kane to the present day, have recorded their impressions of that region, is to mingle for the first time the art work of the Canadian West Coast tribes with that of our more sophisticated artists in an endeavour to analyse their relationships to one another, if such exist, and particularly to enable this primitive and interesting art to take a definite place as one of the most valuable of Canada's artistic productions (NGC 1927, 3).*

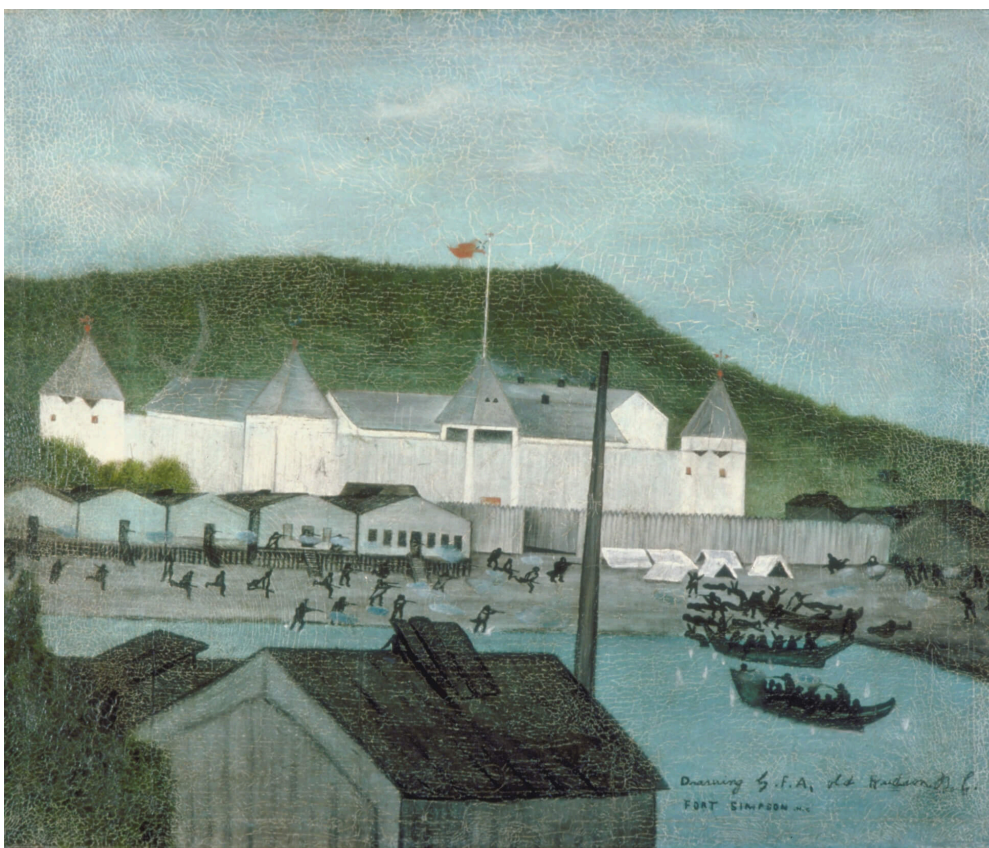


Figure 2.7 Frederick Alexcee, *A Fight Between the Haida and the Tsimshian, Port Simpson, c.1896*. Oil on cloth, 83.8 x 129.5 cm. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau.

The painting above by Tsimshian artist Frederick Alexcee, as well as another watercolour painting by Alexcee, *Indian Village of Port Simpson*, were the only two paintings by a contemporary Indigenous artist working in a Western visual tradition—oil and watercolour paint—to be included in the 1927 exhibition.

Read this excerpt from the catalogue describing Alexcee's work:

*The two paintings by Fred Alexcee...might be placed among the primitives of Canadian art here exhibited. In European countries primitive paintings have been prized for their naivete, their charm, and the historical perspective which they confer upon the development of art. In Canada this category has so far eluded search, if we except Indian art pure and simple. Alexcee's work possesses something of the quality which we should expect from such primitive painting, and he himself is an old Tsimshian half-breed of Port Simpson, BC...His sense of colour is limited; his composition is as a rule excellent; and the movement is spontaneous and spirited (NGC 1927, 3).*

Read art historian Leslie Dawn's response to this description:

*In support, the paragraph supplies an evolutionary and hierarchized model in which artistic and cultural production progresses from the naïve/primitive to the knowing, or, one might say, from incompetence to mastery. Coming from an earlier stage in this development, which had Western art at its apex, Alexcee's works are "limited" and lacking, especially in their "sense of colour,"...By employing "primitive" to mean both "naïve" and Native, the catalogue strategically extended the term so that it referred not only to Native work that did not display a full grasp of the conventions that constitute Western art, but also to Native art in general...(Dawn 2009, 253).*

Read curator Kaitlin McCormick's assessment of correspondence about the exhibition:

*Eric Brown...wrote that the 'picture [is] interesting—[with] great spirit & feeling & remarkable for someone without training or opportunity of seeing art.' Brown was wrong: Alexcee had seen European art in a range of sources—in catalogs, probably in newspapers, and at the HBC store at Port Simpson. Though [Government agent John] Flewin commissioned A Fight between the Haida and Tsimshian to commemorate Fort Simpson's early days, I suggest that Alexcee's version reveals his personal perspective, informed by a Tsimshian worldview. Alexcee's conversations with Garfield in the 1930s (documented in her field notes) suggest that he felt nostalgic for the days before colonialism took root in Lax Kw'alaams.*

*Though the painting has been described as "flat," I would argue that the composition shows depth in the way Alexcee executed its fore-, middle, and backgrounds. The viewer gazes on the scene as if from behind the protection of the plank house (its roof is painted with raised smoke slats) and pole in the foreground, while the drama, said to represent an epic battle between the Haida and Tsimshian in 1855, unfolds with the land of (presumably) Haida canoes and a skirmish on the beach. In this painting, Fort Simpson is depicted as the backdrop to an episode of Indigenous conflict that may have begun before the fort was established. Alexcee's depiction of this event would have been informed by his knowledge of the site and his community's oral histories. The painting is a panoramic rendering of a notable episode in Tsimshian and Haida history and not only illustrates the early fort for its buyer but portrays a specific moment in time from Alexcee's perspective. (McCormick 2018, 251)*

According to McCormick, Alexcee's painting reversed the colonial gaze. The inclusion of Indigenous visual culture in the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern* was important: the curators were acknowledging that Indigenous material production was worthy of aesthetic consideration. However, as we can see in Dawn and McCormick's texts, the discourses which informed the view of Indigenous visual culture were deeply problematic. From the mid-19th century onward, with the emergence of anthropology as a discipline, Indigenous objects began to be viewed as specimens that could be studied scientifically. Museums of ethnology and natural history began to amass large collections of Indigenous material and produced and reified a view that humans developed progressively, viewing Indigenous cultures and peoples as "primitive" and Europeans as more advanced and "civilized." As Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips argue, "Such evolutionist studies were used to support laws and policies designed by the American and Canadian governments to assimilate Indigenous peoples into settler societies and erase their languages and cultures" (Berlo and Phillips, 8).

Read the following excerpts from Steven Loft's essay "Reflections on 20 Years of Aboriginal Art," which discuss another important and very controversial exhibition, *The Spirit Sings* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988.

*Twenty-one years after the Indians of Canada pavilion, another exhibition of Aboriginal art would also incur much discussion and controversy. The Spirit Sings, organized by the Glenbow Museum [in Calgary] and supported by Shell Oil Corporation, was the most expensive exhibition ever produced in Canada, with a budget of \$2.6 million (almost half of it from Shell) (Phillips, 2006, 129).*

*The exhibition borrowed huge amounts of cultural property—what we would refer to as our art history—from museums all over North America, chosen and curated by non-Aboriginals with no consultation with Aboriginal communities. The curators' intent was to foster an appreciation of pre-contact Indigenous society and culture, all by borrowing looted objects from colonial institutions, while paying for it from money provided by a company that was actively fighting an Aboriginal land claim (the Lubicon Nation) and extracting resources from the disputed territory. A recipe for disaster? Most certainly! Although reasonably well attended, and of course supported by government and corporate interests, the exhibition has gone down as one of the lowest points in the museal history of Indigenous art in this country.*

*Rebecca Belmore's protest performance in support of the Lubicon and their call for a boycott was a telling and powerful response. She staged her performance in front of the museum without the museum's consent, holding a sign signifying her as artifact #671b. A museum code? Or a Liquor Control*

*Board number for a cheap bottle of wine? She was intentionally ambiguous about this. Belmore was not only metaphorically codifying herself, she was constraining her body to a history of abuse and commodification perpetrated against Aboriginal people, including by museums. But as a site of resistance and subversion, she rose above the museological taxonomies epitomized in The Spirit Sings and emerged as strong, unbowed, and in complete control.*

*I would not become aware of the impact of The Spirit Sings for several years, but as I became more immersed in Indigenous art years later, The Spirit Sings debacle would come up often. As a result of the exhibition, the protests, and the long history of misrepresentation in museums and galleries, a Task Force on Museums and First Peoples formed to make recommendations to government and the arts community on the exhibition and dissemination of works of historical and contemporary art by Aboriginal people. The ensuing report had a much more positive effect than The Spirit Sings (Loft 2012).*

Steven Loft's assertion about the importance of *The Spirit Sings* is underscored by Ruth Phillips, who writes, "virtually all Canadian writers on museums and Indigenous peoples have positioned *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* as the point of departure for the postcolonial project of museum reform that has been underway during the past two decades" (Phillips 2011, 48). Another incredibly important moment for Indigenous artists took place in 1986, when the National Gallery of Canada purchased the first artwork by a contemporary Indigenous artist.

LOOK at and read about Carl Beam's *North American Iceberg* and consider how late 1986 is, given that the NGC was founded in 1888!

READ the essay by Alison Ariss on Gina Grant, Helen Calbreath, Krista Point, Debra Sparrow and Robyn Sparrow's *Out of the Silence* (1997) which examines four Salish blankets created by these five xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Musqueam artists. Consider what we can learn about the marginalization of Indigenous (women's) visual culture, like weaving, and how this one artwork example reveals a complex history.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.5

Imagine you are an art gallery curator. If you were curating an exhibition of Indigenous art and/or visual culture, what steps would you take to ensure that it represents the art or visual culture ethically and respectfully? Outline some of the things that you would have to consider in the process of putting the exhibition together.



## The erasure of knowledge, revival, and resistance

In this section we will explore the history of residential schools in Canada. The artworks and readings here deal with issues which may cause trauma due to this difficult subject matter. Support is available for anyone affected by their experience at residential schools, and those who are triggered by this topic. A national Indian Residential School Crisis Line has been set up to provide support for former students and those affected. People can access emotional and crisis referral services by calling the 24-hour national crisis line: 1-866-925-4419.

WATCH the embedded videos on residential schools in Canada and read the accompanying **Canadian Encyclopedia** entry. While you may be familiar with some of this history, what did you learn from this entry that you did not already know?

In 2015, the Federal Government released the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. We encourage you to read the 94 Calls to Action here. It took more than 100 years for the Canadian government to recognize the consequences of the residential schools. Why did it take so long for the truth to be recognized? Considering your own position and background, how do you position yourself in relation to the TRC Calls to Action?

The purpose of the residential schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into Western culture, to eliminate all aspects of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing. In this module we will consider how this school system attempted to eradicate Indigenous knowledge, culture, and language by examining a few select artworks that address this difficult history.



Figure 2.8 Joane Cardinal-Schubert, *The Lesson*, 1989. Chairs, books, apples, rope, mirror, whistles and chalk, dimensions variable. Installation view photo by Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

Joane Cardinal-Schubert's installation and performance, *The Lesson*, was created before the last residential school closed in 1996 in Canada; the artwork's importance continues to reverberate. This is a powerful artwork

and one of the first to address this difficult topic. Dr. Joane Cardinal-Schubert was born in Red Deer, Alberta. She was an award-winning Kainaiwa (Blood) artist, curator, lecturer, poet, and director. Her artworks and writing often address contemporary political issues, such as Indigenous sovereignty, cultural appropriation, and environmental concerns. She was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal, the Commemorative Medal of Canada, and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in Art.

Read Monique Westra writing about *The Lesson*, which was first realized by Cardinal-Schubert in 1989 at Article Gallery in Montreal and has been exhibited many times since:

*The setting of the schoolroom is significant because it vividly recalls the devastating residential school experience of Indigenous people in Canada, a wrenching issue Joane addressed in a compact but emotionally charged installation...called simply The Lesson. The Lesson depicts a claustrophobic classroom, with chairs tied together with ropes, their seats topped by apples pierced with screw hooks, and chalkboards covered with strident texts written by hand about many of the past and present injustices that took place in such classrooms. The Lesson was reconstructed in nearly twenty venues across Canada and the United States. In one venue at the Toronto International Powwow in 1999, installed ten years after it was first created, more than 2,500 people viewed the exhibition. One of the chalkboards, the "Memory Wall," invited Indigenous people to write their names and thoughts on the board. Many of the visitors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, left in tears (Sharman 2017, 41).*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.6

Consider your reaction to some of the elements in the installation, what do you make of the use of black paint, the ropes binding the chairs together, and the bright red apples screwed down into the chairs? "Apple" is a derogatory term used by First Nations toward other First Nations; it implies that one is "red on the outside, but white on the inside." The work is also interactive, as Westra notes. Viewers can add their own experiences, thoughts, or memories to the blackboard with chalk that is left out for everyone. What would you write on the blackboard walls in *The Lesson*?

*Clouds of Autumn* (2015) is a film by Trevor Mack and Matthew Tailor Blais. Set on the Tsilhqot'in plateau in British Columbia in the 1970s, *Clouds of Autumn* focuses on a young Indigenous boy named William and his older sister Shayl. The carefree childhood existence of an Indigenous brother and sister is torn apart when the older sister is forced to attend a residential school far from home. The film explores the impact residential schools had on the relationships of Indigenous people with themselves, their heritage, and nature. Watch the film here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=128#oembed-3>

Carey Newman's *The Witness Blanket* (2015) is an artwork in the form of a large-scale sculpture and a memorial. While we have looked at an art installation and a short film addressing residential schools, *The Witness Blanket* is quite different. Now part of the collection of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, it was

inspired by a woven blanket but is in fact a large-scale art installation made out of hundreds of items reclaimed from residential schools, churches, government buildings, and traditional and cultural structures, including Friendship Centres, band offices, treatment centres, and universities from across Canada.

WATCH the documentary, *Picking Up the Pieces: The Making of the Witness Blanket* (2015) and read the accompanying text. *The Witness Blanket* is meant to be a national monument to honour the children who attended residential schools in Canada.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 2.7

Write down some of your reactions to both *Clouds of Autumn* and *Picking Up the Pieces*. Choose one of the films and respond to the following:

1. For *Clouds of Autumn*, what is the narrative as far as you understand the film? What really struck you about the film? What visual details resonated? What sounds? How does sound reinforce the relationship of the children to the land?
2. For *Picking Up the Pieces*, what does it mean to be a witness? What is the significance of a blanket? Do some research on your own about the importance of blankets in many First Nations cultures. Describe your reaction to the artwork and documentary.



Figure 2.9 Adrian Stimson, *Sick and Tired*, 2004. Windows and infirmary bed from Old Sun Residential School, feathers, fluorescent lights, bison robe, dimensions variable. Collection of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, purchased with the assistance of Taylor Automotive Group in memory of Bobbie Taylor.



The last artwork we will examine to address residential schools is Adrian Stimson's 2004 installation *Sick and Tired*. Adrian Stimson is an artist from Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation. Read Stimson's description of *Sick and Tired* in the accompanying exhibition catalogue for the 2013 exhibition *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Residential Schools*:

*Sick and Tired is an installation that explores identity, history and transcendence through the reconfiguration of architectural and natural fragments. It is an homage to colonial history. Its elements are three Old Sun Residential School windows, filled with feathers and back lit, and an old infirmary bed from the same school with a bison robe folded into a human shape placed on its springs. The bed is illuminated from the top to create a shadow beneath similar to a stretched hide. This work references material culture and post-colonial issues in Aboriginal art. Sick and Tired is a continuation of my explorations into my Siksika (Blackfoot) identity and the reality of cultural genocide. Combined, these elements speak to fragmentation, re-signification and counter memory—ideas that are a part of colonial or post-colonial discourse.*

*Residential schools were instruments of genocide; they created isolation, disorientation, pain and death and ultimately broke many human spirits. I can imagine many children peering out of these windows, longing to be home with their families. Their reality, however, was confinement similar to being smothered by a pillow. Sickness and disease were and still are a reality for First Nations—a legacy of illness represented by the infirmary bed. How many people lay sick, tired, dying or dead on this bed is not known, yet I feel the heaviness of its presence, a state that exhausts me physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The bison robe configured like a mummy lies on the bedsprings; it is a cultural reference that speaks to another fragment, that of a historically decimated mammal analogous to the people and their culture. A light shines down illuminating robe and bed; the shadow beneath represents a stretched hide and speaks to the duality of life and death or the yet known. For me, creating this installation has been a way to exorcise and transcend the colonial project, a way to forgiveness, healing and obtaining a state of grace (Witnesses 2013, 55).*

## LEARNING JOURNAL 2.8

Read Leah Sandals' conversation with Jonathan Dewar in *Canadian Art* magazine, "Art, Residential Schools & Reconciliation: Important Questions." What is the purpose of art in the reconciliation process—or what has been called the reconciliation process? What are some of the problems with the government process of reconciliation? What are some of the considerations around exhibiting artworks about residential schools? Stimson sees his work as a form of activism. Consider the ways that *Sick and Tired*, *The Lesson*, and *Clouds of Autumn* support this idea of art as activism.

## Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit

The following excerpt is from curator and art historian Heather Igloliorte's essay, "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum."

*Although there exists a vast literature on Inuit art in Canada—including hundreds of exhibition catalogues and scholarly texts, edited volumes, journal articles, and publications in the popular*

*media—very little of it has been produced by Inuit. Despite the critical and commercial success of Inuit art, which has flourished since the beginning of the modern Inuit art movement in the mid-twentieth century into an internationally recognized art form and multimillion-dollar industry, the research, study, and dissemination of Inuit art has largely been the work of Qallunaat (non-Inuit) scholars, curators, critics, and museum staff. Few Inuit authors have ever been published in art-historical texts . . . The impact of this is that Inuit art—including everything from the earliest archeological findings to contemporary works—has been almost entirely interpreted by Qallunaat. Therefore, despite the rich literature, often written by those who have worked closely with Inuit artists over the last seven decades of the modern and contemporary arts industry (since 1948), the existing scholarship still represents a deep imbalance between who is being written about and who is writing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the lack of Inuit scholars has meant that Inuit perspectives and knowledge have been conspicuously absent from much of the research and writing on Inuit art as well (Igloliorte 2017, 100-113).*

Heather Igloliorte considers a new direction for interpreting Inuit art history using Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ). She writes, “While the Inuktitut phrase is often simply translated as “Inuit traditional knowledge,” it can be more accurately understood to encompass the complex matrix of Inuit environmental knowledge, societal values, cosmology, worldviews, and language” (102).

Igloliorte goes on to outline six basic principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), which guide Inuit ontologies and social relations for Arctic residents—people, animals, and non-human entities:

1. **Pilimmasarniq**: the concept that guides the way in which Inuit artists train and develop; it is the acquisition of knowledge. Most artists learn and develop their artistic skills by observing and learning from other Inuit artists.
2. **Angiqatigiinniq**: emphasizes the importance of consensus-building and collective decision making, with a focus on benefiting the community before the individual. This tenet of IQ can also be seen in the art cooperatives, which have been in operation since the 1950s and 1960s.
3. **Pinasuqatigiinniq**: refers to the principle of working together for the common good.
4. **Pijitsirarniq**: the concept of serving the common good, which is crucial to the understanding of how success is measured in Inuit communities.
5. **Qanurtuuqatigiinniq**: refers to being resourceful, to adapt, innovate, and be creative and inventive to solve problems.
6. **Avatimik kamatsianiq**: the concept of environmental stewardship; emphasizes the responsibility of Inuit to be respectful of their limited resources and to protect the land and its inhabitants.



Figure 2.10 Annie Pootoogook, *Pitseolak Drawing with Two Girls on the Bed*, detail, 2006. Colored pencil on paper, 50.8 x 66 cm. Private collection (artwork © Dorset Fine Arts; photograph provided by Dorset Fine Arts).



2.11 David Ruben Piqtoukun, *Division of Meat*, 1996. Brazilian soapstone, 19 x 14.5 x 51 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001/417 (artwork © David Ruben Piqtoukun; photograph provided by Art Gallery of Ontario) as in Igloliorte, Heather. "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum." *Art Journal* 76, no. 2 (2017): 100–113.

## LEARNING JOURNAL 2.9

Look at the two artworks above by Inuit artists Annie Pootoogook and David Ruben Piqtoukun. To which principles of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit do you think they connect? Explain how they connect to these principals, paying attention to visual and material details. How are the principles of Inuit

Qaujimajatuqangit similar to ways you have come to know and understand things in your own experience? Are any of these principles new to you? In what ways might they enrich your own ways of knowing in the future, particularly when it comes to the intersections of visual artworks and histories?

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Alison Ariss on Gina Grant, Helen Calbreath, Krista Point, Debra Sparrow and Robyn Sparrow, *Out of the Silence* (1997)
- Carolyn Butler Palmer, with Carmen Thompson, on Art Thompson, *Dididat The Legend of the Swans and Wolves* (1995)

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## Additional resources

### Where are the children?

This interactive website provides extensive historical information about the residential school era. It contains pictures, audio recordings and videos depicting the lives of those who were forcibly taken to the schools. For further information, please see the following website:

- Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre
  - <https://algonqu.ca/research/shingwauk-residential-schools-centre/>
  - <http://shingwauk.org/srsc/>
- Centre du conservation Quebec. *La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France retrouve son intégrité*



# ENCOUNTER



*3.1 Hudson's Bay Company, Team Canada Sweater, Closing Ceremony Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games, 2009-2020. Museum of Vancouver.*

The hand-knit sweater shown here was made by the Hudson's Bay Company in 2010, to be worn by Team Canada athletes at the Closing Ceremony of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Made of chunky wool, the sweater features a zipper closure, garter-stitch shawl collar, and distinctive bands of patterning in black, white, gray, and red. The design—with two large elk heads on the front and the word "CANADA" across the back as well as a ribbon of maple leaves on the lower border—almost appears "pixelated," an artefact of the knitted stitches used to produce this garment.

While similar to other mass-produced sweaters and to other Olympic gear featuring national emblems, this Hudson's Bay sweater was considered controversial at the time of its production. Some accused HBC of cultural appropriation, pointing to the stylistic similarities between this garment and what is known as the Cowichan sweater, a type of wool sweater made with thick yarn in natural colours of black, white, and brown by the Coast Salish communities in and around Vancouver Island since at least the early twentieth century. In this sense, the Cowichan sweater is a relatively recent manifestation of Coast Salish expertise in working with wool. For centuries prior to European contact, Coast Salish women were renowned for their production of handwoven blankets, which not only fulfilled daily and ceremonial needs, but were also one of the most valued mediums of exchange between Indigenous communities.

As an object, the HBC sweater underscores the complex relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada and, more broadly, the vexed objects that arise when disparate cultural groups encounter and interact with one another. Such encounters are embodied in the sweater for, according to Sylvia Olsen, they are a "material expression of the junction between two cultures, a fusion or a hybridization of European and indigenous art and craft" (2016, 16).

Canadian art history has often focused on a version of Canada as a nation founded on European settlement and trade, advanced by taming the "wilderness," eventually gaining independence and national pride through

military contributions and an embrace of multiculturalism. However, Canada's history is complex, based on a violent history of colonialism, the government's perpetration of racial injustice, and the view that the natural environment was, and is, solely for extraction and economic gain.

In this module, you will examine a series of case studies which demonstrate how art and visual culture reveal some of this complex history which includes interconnected relationships, cultural transfers, and translations. An early Bandolier Bag—a bag carried by European soldiers to store ammunition—can offer insight into early colonial encounters between French, British, and Indigenous peoples, while a contemporary “digital intervention” by Sonny Assu reframes our understanding of colonial-settler art and makes a claim for Indigenous futurity.

This module also examines the legacy of colonial encounter in Canada. John Ralston Saul has noted that a good part of Canada's history is marred by the refusal to accept the ongoing role of Indigenous peoples in shaping Canadian society, in “Each way you turn, the roots of the Canadian idea are tied up in Aboriginal concepts and methods. That is the past, but it is also the present and the future” (2002). Objects and artworks can help us understand these roots by telling us stories about colonialism, migration, race, and gender, and their lasting legacy in the present.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.1

Find an object in your house. Write three or four sentences about how it is the manifestation of encounter. Consider how it reflects a hybridization or conjuncture between cultures or cultural practices.

## By the end of this module you will be able to:

- recognize the impact of early contact and settlement on people and land
- discuss the form, content, and context of contemporary artworks dealing with the legacy of the colonial encounter
- define the term “salvage paradigm” and correctly apply it to a discussion of key artworks
- analyze the complex connections between people, cultures, and ideas revealed by works of art and visual culture.

## It should take you:

**Team Canada Sweater** Text 6 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 110 min

**Objects of encounter** Text 28 min, Video 4 min, Video 7 min

**Visualizing encounter** Text 23 min, Video 3 min

**Legacies of colonial encounter** Text 46 min, Video 1 min, Video 4 min, Video 13 min

**Learning journals** 11 x 20 min = 220m

**Total: approximately 7.75 hours**



## Key works:

- Fig. 3.1 Hudson's Bay Company, *Team Canada Sweater* (Vancouver Olympics) (2010)
- Fig. 3.2 Winnebago (possibly) *Bandolier Bag* (1880s)
- Fig. 3.3 Barry Ace, *trinity suite: Bandolier for Niibwa Ndanwendaagan (My Relatives); Bandolier for Manidoo-minising (Manitoulin Island); and Bandolier for Charlie* (2015)
- Figs. 3.4a Paul Kane, *Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow* (1846) and 3.4b (c. 1849–56)
- Fig. 3.5 William Berczy, *Joseph Brandt (Thayendanegea)* (c.1807)
- Fig. 3.6 Ruth Cuthand, *Trading: Smallpox* (2008)
- Fig. 3.7 Emily Carr, *Totem Poles, Kitseukla* (1912)
- Fig. 3.8 Sonny Assu, *What a Great Spot for a Walmart!* (2014)
- Fig. 3.9 Brendan Tang, *Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-x* (2020)
- Fig. 3.10 Brian Jungen, *Prototype for New Understanding #16* (2004)

Much of the art historical analysis in this module is based on a basic understanding of complex historical events. For a broad chronological overview of key events and developments in Indigenous history in what is now Canada, please read and review *The Canadian Encyclopedia* entry Timeline: Indigenous Peoples.

You might also be interested in *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* Timeline of 100 Significant Events in Canadian History.

## Objects of encounter

Mary Louise Pratt describes the “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” as contact zones. These are spaces, she argues, characterized by “highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths, as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991, 34). The objects and artworks under consideration in this module point to this idea of contact zones. They reveal the networks and relationships of exchange—often inequitable relationships—that form part of the history of visual culture in what is now Canada. The often-violent colonization and eventual permanent settlement of Canada required cultural exchange, negotiation and trade from the outset. Some artworks and objects, like the heavily beaded bandolier bags or Paul Kane’s portraits of Indigenous people, point to the ways that disparate cultures met and attempted to come to terms with each other.

Resistance to colonial power and transculturation have always been a part of Indigenous culture, and these processes are acutely visible in the work of many contemporary artists like Ruth Cuthand, Sonny Assu, and Brendan Tang. Pratt defines transculturation as the “processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (1991, 36).

Consider different perspectives on the idea of encounter. In what ways do you encounter other cultures in your life? Are there examples from your experience in which you have noticed disparate cultures “meet[ing], clash[ing], and grappl[ing] with each other”?

Read Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank’s object essay “Bandolier Bag” on Smarthistory. What types of encounters do these bags document? By looking more closely at bandolier bags, we can see how objects can be viewed as physical manifestations of encounter between different cultures.



*Figure 3.2 Winnebago (?), Bandolier Bag, 1880s. Wool and cotton trade cloth, wool yarn, glass, metal, 87.6 x 30.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

Bandolier bags are relatively large, very heavily beaded pouches or bags made from cotton, wool, velvet or leather and worn diagonally on the body like a messenger bag. They were beaded using glass beads, a trade good introduced by European settlers and which, in the mid-1800s, replaced the traditional porcupine quillwork in popularity, because they were easier to find and use, and were available in a greater variety of colours. The bags originated with Indigenous groups in the Eastern Woodlands/Great Lakes area of what is now Canada and the United States, and were modelled after European military ammunition bags. Women made bandolier bags, sewing thousands of glass beads over the entire surface of the bags. In Anishinaabe, these bags are called *aazhooningwa'on*, which means “worn across the shoulder.”

Watch the short film “From quills to beads: the bandolier bag”:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadararthistories/?p=40#oembed-1>



Figure 3.3 Barry Ace, trinity suite: Bandolier for Niibwa Ndanwendaagan (My Relatives); Bandolier for Manidoo-minising (Manitoulin Island); and Bandolier for Charlie (2015). Mixed media (motion sensor display monitors, fabric, metal, horsehair, extension cords, mirror, plastic, capacitors and resistors), 207 x 95 x 53 cm. Installed (McLean Centre, 2018) at Art Gallery of Ontario.

For contemporary artist Barry Ace, bandolier bags continue to be dynamic media for exploring intersections of tradition and technology. Honouring his Anishinaabe roots, his recent works incorporate reclaimed and salvaged electronic components that at first appear to look like Woodland-style beadwork. He explains,

*It's an introduction of a new technology, very much like beads when they were introduced to North America . . . It shows that our culture has never been in stasis. We've always been moving forward and are not stuck in an anthropological past, but are always looking for new ways of cultural expression* (Deer 2019).

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.3

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) has many bandolier bags in its collection. Search the ROM's

collection here to find a bag. Based on what you have learned from the previous essay and video, describe the form, content, and possible context of your selected bag.

As a result of encounter during the 18th and 19th centuries, aspects of both European and Indigenous tastes, styles, and materials led to increasingly hybrid garments. The following video discusses how trade networks and exchange are reflected in an Anishinaabe outfit collected by a British Lieutenant that dates to around 1790.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=40#oembed-2>*

Let's look at another outfit that addresses issues of encounter and trade. *O'Halloran's Outfit* was originally given to Captain Henry Dunn O'Halloran by Mi'kmaq chief Joseph Maly Itkobith as part of an honorary-chief ceremony on the banks of the Miramichi River near present-day Esgenoôpetitj First Nation. The outfit consists of a blue frock coat with silk appliqués, encrusted double-curve beadwork, blue cloth leggings, beadwork moccasins, a tobacco pouch in the shape of a beaver with four red cloth tabs covered with beadwork, and a beaded hood with a Union Jack and gold braids on both sides. It is assumed that three or more unidentified Mi'kmaq women contributed the needlework on the garments. After O'Halloran's tour, the coat was taken back to England and remained in the possession of the O'Halloran family until 1977, when the Captain's great-great-granddaughter put it up for auction in London, England. It was purchased by the Canadian Museum of History. In addition to the textile pieces, the outfit came with two parchment scrolls O'Halloran created in commemoration of his adoption ceremony into the Mi'kmaq nation. O'Halloran's outfit is another example of early material culture whose visual details reveal cross-cultural exchange.

## Visualizing encounter



Figure 3.4a Paul Kane, Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow, "The Man That Gives the War Whoop," 1846. Watercolour and graphite on wove paper, 13.5 x 11 cm. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. This reproduction is a copy of the version available at [https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/canadian-west/052910/05291020\\_e.html](https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/canadian-west/052910/05291020_e.html).



Figure 3.4b Paul Kane, "Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow," ("The man that gives the war whoop, Head Chief of the Crees"), Plains Cree, 1849-1856. Oil on canvas, 75.9 x 63.4 cm. Royal Ontario Museum. With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum © ROM.

The watercolour sketch and oil painting you see here, both entitled *Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow, Plains Cree*, are evidence of the encounters the artist Paul Kane had with various Indigenous peoples during his years of travel across Canada. While out in the field, Kane produced sketches as you see on the left, and later, back in his Toronto studio, he developed these sketches into a cycle of one hundred oil paintings on canvas, an example of which you see on the right. While Kane's sketches and journal writings capture what he saw with some accuracy, later in his studio he often modified his sketches to conform to a more Romantic ideal.

Kane is a complex artist whose artworks offer a compelling entry point for considering the encounter between Indigenous peoples and early settler artists and explorers in the 19th century. His remarkable travels in the Northwest at a time of great transition (particularly for Indigenous peoples across Canada) and his visual record and written observations of First Nations and Métis peoples reflect the prevailing attitudes toward Indigenous peoples held by white colonial settlers in the mid-19th century.

Compare and contrast the watercolour and oil versions of Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow. Consider what the sitter is wearing. What do the clothes tell you about the sitter? How much European influence do you see? What in the sketch leads you to this conclusion? What has changed from the original field sketch to the final oil painting? Why do you think Kane made the changes he did?

Paul Kane was born in Ireland in 1810 and arrived in Toronto with his parents as a young child in 1819. After his studies, he began working as a decorative painter in a furniture factory. He later made a name for himself with a studio on King St. in Toronto where he worked as a coach, sign and house painter, since it was challenging to make a living in Canada simply as an artist. In 1834 he left for Cobourg on the shores of Lake Ontario, where he began his long career as a portrait painter and married Harriet Clench. In 1836, he travelled around the US, eventually finding himself in Mobile, Alabama, where his reputation grew enough that he was featured in the local newspaper. In Mobile, he managed to raise enough money to travel to Europe in 1841, and, for the next four years, ventured to France and Italy, visiting museums and copying the old masters, essentially teaching himself by copying and studying the great works of art's past. After four years of European study, he returned to North America by way of Switzerland and London, where an encounter with the work of the American artist George Catlin changed the course of Kane's career.

Paul Kane has also been an inspiration for contemporary artists. In the following video, more contemporary painters and artists talk about their engagement with Kane's work:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=40#oembed-3>

In Arlene Gehmacher's analysis of Kane's oeuvre she identifies the salvage paradigm to be one of the major critical issues in his work. She explains:

*Kane's mission to record the life of Aboriginal peoples of the Northwest has all the hallmarks of what later became known as the salvage paradigm in which a dominant society attempting to save through documentation the culture of another that it considers to be at risk of vanishing. This motivation is particularly clear in George Catlin's Indian Gallery project, created in direct response to the U.S. government's agenda to remove the Aboriginal people to reservations. Although Canadian policy was less overt, this idea did have currency in Canada and was mentioned in 1852 in the context of an exhibit of Kane's paintings. (The Provincial Exhibition). Kane's attitude seems to have supported the salvage imperative as he accepted the inevitability of the Aboriginal peoples' demise caused by the relentless encroachment of Western civilization.*

*Yet a conundrum lies at the heart of Kane's work. Contemporary critical analysis pegs Kane as an appropriator who profited from picturing the lives of disempowered indigenous peoples, and even as a racist who failed to adequately respect the cultures he encountered and portrayed. However, Kane did make copious detailed and accomplished renderings of individuals and their thriving and vital culture. His work has no photographic parallel, for no one had yet turned a camera on the prairies and beyond.*



*Kane thus built an enduring and valuable primary visual record of a culture that we otherwise would not have* (Gehmacher 2014).

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.5

Define “salvage paradigm” in your own words. Can you think of other examples where this theory can be applied?

Paul Kane and other artists, like George Catlin and Cornelius Krieghoff, participated in the salvage paradigm by freezing Indigenous peoples in time. Viewers at the time, and for decades to follow, viewed Kane’s paintings as official, truthful documents that communicated accurate information about Indigenous communities and peoples. However, Kane romanticized his sitters and created historically inaccurate portraits of the peoples he saw on his travels. As Diane Eaton notes, “It was Kane’s custom in the studio oils to embellish the subjects of his field sketches with Native regalia—feathers and war bonnets, pipe stems, bear-claw necklaces, and elaborately folded buffalo-skin shirts—regardless of band or tribal origin, in order to recast them as Europeanized icons of the Romantic ‘noble savage.’ Europeans wanted mythologized depictions of North America’s Native people that dramatized them as proud, independent, virtuous, and manly” (Eaton xi).

Kane’s paintings should be viewed as emblematic of the colonial power that European settlers had in the process of representation, a colonial power intimately linked to the violent conquest of land and territory in Canada. Let’s turn now to one of Canada’s first professional portrait painters and his interpretation of the famous Mohawk leader, Thayendanegea.



Figure 3.5 William Berczy, *Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea)*, c.1807. Oil on canvas, 61.8 x 46.1cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Public domain. Uploaded by Wikimedia users cybermusegallery.ca and The AMICA Library.

The story of Western art-making in Canada—that is, paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures—begins to unfold as soon as contact and permanent settlement begin in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, it was not until the 18th century that portraiture as a genre—in particular secular portraiture—took hold in Canada. As the country's forests turned into farms, and towns and cities grew, artists who had initially created art for churches began to turn their attention to the people who had been living here and who were slowly immigrating to Canada.

William Berczy was in many respects Canada's first successful professional portrait painter. A German-born painter and the son of a prominent diplomat, he attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria in 1762 and exhibited with the Royal Academy in London. He came to Canada as overseer of a group of German settlers who were headed for upstate New York. Arriving in Upper Canada, York in 1794, Berczy was active in real-estate speculation for the next three years, designing and constructing some of the earliest buildings there and becoming known as a gentleman-painter. Business difficulties forced him to leave, and he eventually settled in Montreal, Quebec in 1804 with his family where he decided to make a living from his skill as a painter and architect. A community the size of Montreal offered opportunities for portraitists that were unmatched

elsewhere in Canada, and the city benefited from a number of accomplished portrait painters in the 1700s. Most of his patrons were French-speaking, but Berczy also received many commissions from English merchants and soldiers too.

Berczy's fame spread quickly in Montreal, and he received numerous portrait commissions, executed church decorations, and did some architectural work. Berczy was invited to Quebec City to paint what is perhaps his best-known portrait from this period, *The Woolsey Family* (1809)—a family portrait set in a finely decorated interior room; the father figure is placed at the centre, surrounded by his children, fine furniture, and loyal dog. The window on the left-hand side opens out onto a view of Quebec City, the gardens of the nuns of the Hotel-Dieu de Quebec, the St. Lawrence River and Orleans Island. As with many commissioned portraits, this painting communicates a great deal about the status and position of its sitters.

William Berczy met Joseph Brant, or Thayendanegea, the Loyalist Chief of the Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawks) at what is now Niagara-on-the Lake, Ontario, in 1794. This portrait was executed after the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), one of the first truly global wars. Although Joseph Brant wasn't heavily involved in the Seven Years' War, he did work closely with the English militia, acting as an interpreter. Brant also aided missionaries in teaching Christianity to the Indigenous people of the area and helped translate religious materials into Kanyen'kehà (Mohawk). Berczy's portrait shows Joseph Brant standing in a classically inspired pose with the head in a three-quarter profile. The outstretched arm evokes imperial authority, while the pleats in the brilliant red blanket echo the folds of a toga. Although the figure appears monumental—an effect emphasized by the low horizon line—each detail of the costume has been rendered with painstaking, almost documentary, precision. The toga aligns this work with classical Greek and Roman sculpture of emperors and political leaders.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.6

Look closely at the portrait of Thayendanegea. Although Brandt employs neo-classical European portrait traditions, many indicators of the sitter's Indigenous identity are also included. How can you understand this work in relation to some of the hybrid objects we considered earlier in the module?

There is another aspect to this portrait worth considering. A year after the American Revolutionary War, in May 1784, Joseph Brant led the Kanyen'kehà Loyalists (those loyal to the British) and other Indigenous peoples to a large tract of land on the Grand River in southwest Ontario that was granted to them in compensation for their losses in the war. This tract was named Brant's Ford (now Brantford, Ontario) after him. Because their tract of land was too small for hunting, Brant feared that Indigenous people would have to learn agriculture to survive. To provide them income, he hoped to lease or sell land to non-Indigenous people. A complicated controversy with the government arose over the nature of Indigenous land tenure, with Brant and other Mohawk leaders fighting for the right of their people to own the lands on which they lived. The government of Upper Canada refused to concede land title to the Mohawk in the Grand River Valley during Brant's lifetime. For decades, from 1776 to his death in 1807, Brant fought in vain with the British and Upper Canada governments for the rights of the Mohawk people to obtain title to the lands of the Grand River Valley. Brant became known for his diplomatic work, especially as a leader of Indigenous tribes who fought for the right to remain on their ancestral lands. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that in Berczy's portrait Joseph Brant is the focal point, personifying his status using European portraiture conventions for rulers and emperors, while the expansive background depicts the land awarded to the Six Nations on the Grand River.

[VIEW RUTH CUTHAND'S WORK HERE](#)

Figure 3.6 Ruth Cuthand, *Trading: Smallpox* (2008) acrylic paint, glass seed beads on beading medium mounted on suede board, 61 × 45.7 × 3.1 cm. MacKenzie Art Gallery.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.7

Look closely at *Trading: Smallpox* by artist Ruth Cuthand and write a formal visual analysis of the artwork. Consider the materials used in conjunction with the subject matter. How might you begin to interpret this artwork? Refer back to the Slow Looking/Close Looking section in the Introduction module to review the steps.

In 2009, Cuthand created the series *Trading*, a collection of beaded and quilled artworks. Eleven of the works depict a different disease brought from Europeans to the Indigenous Americas; the twelfth depicts syphilis, the one novel disease that was brought back to Europe from Indigenous populations. The viruses represented in the *Trading* series are bubonic plague, chickenpox, cholera, diphtheria, influenza, measles, scarlet fever, smallpox, syphilis, typhoid fever, whooping cough, and yellow fever. Each disease is visualized in its microscopic structure, as if in a petri dish. The name of each disease is stenciled in white acrylic paint against the matte black suede surface of the artwork underneath the circular image of the disease. The diseases brought by

Europeans to the Americas are rendered using beads, while syphilis is displayed in quillwork, which consists of dyed porcupine quills sewn onto the backboard. As beads came to replace quills as a common currency for local trade they came to signify the unequal relations of Indigenous and settler systems of trade, where beads were exchanged for valuable furs. Their use is intended to signal both the exploitative practices of settler-colonialism more broadly and the new tools Indigenous peoples encountered because of exchange, such as iron and guns. The *Trading* series is a significant contribution to early 21st-century contemporary art through its evocative yet terrifying allegorical meaning.

READ about Cuthand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Michael Rattray's object essay on *Covid-19 Mask No. 6* (2020), in which the artist beaded two tri-coloured circular patterns representing the virus onto a KN95 medical face mask. Rattray argues that Cuthand has created an object that invokes borders and barriers simultaneously, while calling attention to a system of trade that has deeply affected Indigenous peoples and continues to do so today.

Art historian Carmen Robertson describes Cuthand's use of beadwork and its connection to land and territory in the following excerpts from her essay "Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland":

*Indigenous beaders, too, hold a sensorial bond to place that translates through the process of making manifested in the beaded works. The movement of the needle and thread, creation of design, and choices of colour, demand keen performative attention, which both quiets and opens the mind. A key aspect of beading practices on the Plains references a generational sharing of technologies and knowledge. (15)*

*...With the arrival of Europeans to the Plains over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, cultural and artistic expressions changed and adapted new technologies to suit shifting identities. The quills, feathers, and natural pigments that adorned traditional garments were, for example, interspersed or replaced with glass beads, trade cloth, and new designs. Porcupine quillwork, a sacred art form connected to the ceremonies, societies, and protocols of the Plains peoples, served semiotically as a direct signifier of the land, with quills culled from porcupines and dyes derived from plants and other natural materials. Beads, then, operate as floating signifiers for the land, narrative traditions, and ceremony, but also for how colonial presence cross-pollinates to create meaning. Mohawk scholar Joel Monture puts it another way when he describes quillwork as the "grandmother of beadwork." According to him, quillwork shaped beadwork in an evolutionary process, and the traditional Indigenous medium thus remains present.<sup>14</sup> Beadwork, then, maintains an aesthetic connection to quillwork, even when contemporary issues and ideas complicate that meaning. (16)*

Just as the bandolier bags invite close looking with their meticulous beadwork, Cuthand's beaded representations of viruses and disease solicit the viewer's engagement with their shiny, brightly coloured beaded surfaces. The diseases that Cuthand addresses were, and are, a by-product of trade and encounter, just as the glass beads are.

In the next section we will examine one of Canada's best-known artists, Emily Carr, as well as contemporary artist Sonny Assu's intervention into her artistic legacy. Finally, we will explore two contemporary artists, Brendan Tang and Brian Jungen, whose artworks address themes of identity, cultural value, and hybridization.

## Legacies of colonial encounter



Figure 3.7 Emily Carr, *Totem Poles, Kitseukla*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 126.8 cm x 98.4 cm. Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver. Reproduced by Art Canada Institute.

Settler artist Emily Carr is, like Paul Kane before her, a fascinating but deeply complicated case study in Canadian art history. Looking at her painting *Totem Poles, Kitseukla*, you might begin to wonder what this artist of British descent was doing painting Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en totems in the village of Kitseukla. She straddled the ever-evolving colonial world of Canada, while simultaneously looking to Europe for the new and the modern. Her infatuation with Indigenous cultures was deeply romanticized, and she interpreted her encounters with, and depictions of,

Indigenous culture as she saw fit.

Watch the *Heritage Minute: Emily Carr* by Historica Canada:



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### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.8

How does Historica Canada depict Carr's encounter with Indigenous culture?

Emily Carr was born in Victoria, British Columbia, to British parents. Her mother and father died when she was a young woman. To get out and away from Victoria, in 1890 she convinced her guardian to let her study art at the California School of Design in San Francisco when she was just 18. In late 1893, she returned to Victoria determined to be an artist and set up a studio in the family barn, where she proceeded to paint and offer children's art classes. In 1899, at the age of 28, she saw an Indigenous village for the first time on a visit to the mission school at Ucluelet on the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island (south of Tofino). Carr was intent on growing and developing as an artist and, having saved up enough money from her teaching, she left in 1899 for London, England to enrol in the Westminster School of Art. But her health soon began to suffer from the London air, and she decided to move to the artists' colony at St. Ives in Cornwall for about six months in the early 1900s. In 1904, then 34 and with almost 15 years of art studies behind her, she decided to establish herself as an artist-teacher in Vancouver.

Carr's early Vancouver work was nurtured in a slowly expanding art scene. She was also spurred on by a trip with her sister Alice to Alaska where Carr chronicled their adventures extensively in notebooks and sketches, documenting everything they experienced, from extreme seasickness to visits to Sitka's totem poles. The trip was the impetus for her next project which occupied the following five years of her life: to document Indigenous totem poles and village sites in BC.

In addition to her Alaska trip, Carr frequently visited the Indigenous reserves at Kitsilano and North Vancouver. Once back in Vancouver, she resolved—much as Paul Kane had done 60 years before—to paint a programmatic series that would record the villages and totems she saw for posterity, continuing a tradition of artists participating in the salvage paradigm. Over the next four summers, she visited many remote villages, painting hundreds of watercolours, but she was dissatisfied with the results. To gain more credibility as an artist and to strengthen her own skills, Carr left in 1910 for Paris, aged 39, hoping to acquire the pictorial language to express herself with force.

Carr stayed in Paris for 15 months and her time and training in France changed her work forever. While she didn't take to big city life, while in Paris she was exposed to the work of Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, and to the cult of primitivism. Carr returned to Canada in the summer of 1912 and held an exhibition in her studio, bringing French avant-garde artistic traditions to Vancouver.

Art historian Gerta Moray defines primitivism as “the belief that the art of supposedly primitive societies had an expressive truth that transcended naturalistic representation” (Moray 2010, 60). Carr's interest in primitivism fostered her conviction that the Indigenous visual culture she had seen on her earlier travels (the villages, totems, artefacts, and carvings) “should be recorded and preserved as well as emulated” (Moray 2020, 61). Overjoyed and bolstered by her recent success, Emily Carr spent the summer of 1912 working first in Kwakwaka'wakw villages on the east coast of Vancouver Island, then among the Gitksan of the Upper Skeena River, and finally with the Haida of Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands). In the fall of that year she painted pictures employing the intense colour and broad, expressive brushwork she had learned in France. *Totem Poles, Kitseukla* documents a Gitksan village scene with intact poles situated in close proximity to a series of houses and a few figures seen in the background, in contrast to Tanoo, Q.C.I., which shows no inhabitants—an historically accurate depiction reflecting the aftermath of the smallpox epidemics that devastated all except two Haida villages.

She exhibited these village scenes and other works from this period in her studio in April 1913, the largest one-person show ever held in BC. Sadly, Vancouver viewers seem to have found these paintings difficult to accept. The paintings challenged spectators much more than her French paintings had. Carr sold no pictures from the exhibition and attendance fell off at the painting classes she depended upon for her living. She retreated to Victoria and built a four-suite apartment in the hope of making a living as a landlord to support her art. Life became quite difficult, and Carr, at the age of 42, all but ceased any serious painting. Her reputation as an outsider grew.

Another reason for Carr falling out of favour with gallery-goers was her fervent, almost militant, modernism and her championing of Indigenous traditions. She had, as we might expect, internalized a colonialist view



of Indigenous culture. She wrote, for example: “I glory in our wonderful west and I hope to leave behind me some of the relics of its first primitive greatness. These things should be to us Canadians what the ancient Britons’ relics are to the English. Only a few more years and they will be gone forever into silent nothingness and I would gather my collection together before they are forever past” (Shadbolt 1979, 38). Carr may have had great respect for Indigenous culture, and her desire to salvage or preserve what she saw in BC was perhaps connected to values she was witness to in Indigenous cultures, such as pride in ancestry represented through totem animals, the power of First Nations women, and the terror inspired by nature and the elements. However, we cannot discount Carr’s privileged position as a white colonial settler and her appropriation of Indigenous material culture in her choice of subject matter.

In the 1920s she came into contact with members of the Group of Seven after being invited by the National Gallery of Canada to participate in the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern*, another turning point for Carr; it gave her work greater exposure out east for audiences in Ontario.

Later in her career, Carr devoted her attention more to ecological themes, painting numerous images of clear-cut logging and the effects of deforestation. In *Odds and Ends* the cleared land and tree stumps shift the focus from the majestic forestscapes that lured European and American tourists to the West Coast, to reveal instead the impact of deforestation. Her concern with the effects of industry and its environmental impact, developments that were evident in outlying regions near the BC capital, paralleled her concern with encroachments on the lives of Indigenous people. Large-scale industrial logging had begun in British Columbia in the 1860s, and its influence was visible. We see at this time Carr’s anxiety about this industry as her choice of subject becomes the threatened landscape. At 64, Carr had begun to feel the joy of public recognition. She had great success in her late career, selling many paintings in exhibitions in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. She passed away in 1945, by which time her importance in Canadian art was unquestionable.

Emily Carr’s legacy has been examined and critiqued in more recent years by many scholars and art historians, who have grappled with the artist’s appropriation of and relationship to Indigenous culture. The following excerpt from Marcia Crosby’s essay, “The Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” is written from an Indigenous perspective and discusses the salvage paradigm and the ways that artists like Paul Kane and Emily Carr participated in it.

*An interesting aspect of the salvage paradigm is that it may occur at many historical points. James Clifford describes the conditions under which “saving” an “othered” culture takes place: “a relatively recent period of authenticity is repeatedly followed by a deluge of corruption, transformation, modernization. . . but not so distant or eroded so as to make collection or salvage impossible.” Some sixty years after Paul Kane had recorded the remaining images of so-called authentic Indian life, Emily Carr made up her mind to record for posterity the totem poles of the Northwest Coast in “their own original” village settings before they became a thing of the past. Like Paul Kane, Carr claimed her paintings were “authentic.” There is a double edge to her serious endeavour to record for posterity the remnant of a dying people: Carr paid a tribute to the Indians she “loved,” but who were they? Were they the real or authentic Indians who only existed in the past, or the Indians in the nostalgic, textual remembrances she created in her later years? They were not the native people who took her to the abandoned villages on “a gas boat” rather than a canoe. My point is that the “produced authenticity” or stereotype that Clifford refers to is invisible in Carr’s work, and therein lies the danger. It could be argued that her paintings were authentic or real in the sense that they were ethnographic depictions of actual abandoned villages and rotting poles. However, the paintings of the last poles intimate that the authentic Indians who made them existed only in the past, and that all the changes that occurred afterwards provide evidence of racial contamination, and cultural and moral deterioration. These works also imply that native culture is a quantifiable thing, which may be measured in degrees of “Indianness” against defined forms of authenticity, only located in the past. Emily Carr loved the same Indians Victorian society rejected, and whether they were embraced or rejected does not change the fact that they were Imaginary Indians.*

*Images of abandoned villages, such as Tanoo, with the remaining poles leaning over, rotting in neglect and deterioration, call up images of a not-too-distant culture removed from the present. The remaining fragments of Northwest Coast native culture are to be recorded for the historical interests of British Columbia and Canada.*

*Obviously, material culture does not grow or exist in a forest by itself. The poles Carr painted were created by and belong to the First Nations peoples of the Northwest Coast. Carr's literary description, in her mission statement, of the poles as relics to record (to "save" as traces of "the West's primitive greatness") locates her work within the salvage paradigm. She describes the poles as belonging to a geographical space, a landscape devoid of its original owners. Her association of the material culture of the Northwest Coast native people with the "primitive greatness of the West" was naturally facilitated by the already entrenched construction of the Indian as nature. Carr invests the "relics" of her country, Canada, with a meaning that has to do with her national identity, not the national identity of the people who own the poles. The issue here is that the induction of First Nations peoples' history and heritage into institutions as a lost Canadian heritage should be considered within the context of the colonization of aboriginal land. At this time, when the struggles of First Nations people for aboriginal rights and self-identity are being widely publicized, it is inappropriate, I think, for an art historian to describe Carr's remarks as a "statement of high moral purpose." However, commonly held notions not only of Imaginary Indians, but of Canada's mythical icons—or sacred cows—die hard.*

Crosby summarizes her concerns with Carr:

*I do not believe that Carr could have possibly had "a profound understanding" of the many nations of native people who inhabited the Northwest Coast during her time. They were, and still are: Nisga'a, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Haisia, Haida, Nuuchah'nulth, Kwagiulth, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Songish, Cowichan, Nanaimo/Chemainus, Comox, Sechelt, Squamish, and Sto:lo. (this list does not include the southern-, central- or northern-interior nations.) If she did forge a deep bond with an imaginary, homogeneous heritage, it was with something that acted as a container for her Eurocentric beliefs, her search for a Canadian identity and her artistic intentions (1991).*

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.9

What is your reaction to Marcia Crosby's analysis and critique of Emily Carr? Consider your own perspective on Emily Carr and her artwork. How might we both appreciate her artworks, while at the same time remain aware of the role she played in colonization and in colonial attitudes toward Indigenous peoples?





Figure 3.8 Sonny Assu, *What a great spot for a Walmart!*, 2014. Digital intervention on an Emily Carr Painting (*Graveyard Entrance, Campbell River*, 1912). Archival pigment print, 22.5 x 33.25 cm. Image credit: Sonny Assu. Image courtesy of the Sonny Assu and the Equinox Gallery.

It is hard to look past the bold, bright and graphic “tag” that contemporary Ligwildaꝯw/ Kwakwaka’wakw artist, Sonny Assu, foregrounds in his artwork, *What a Great Spot for a Walmart!*, to what lies beneath, but keep looking and you will see a historical work by Emily Carr from 1912. This 2014 “digital intervention” re-appropriates

an historic painting by Carr, who, in turn, appropriated totem poles and Indigenous villages. “I think a lot of people assume that she was documenting a dying race,” Assu says. “But indigenous [sic] peoples are still here. We were brought to the brink of extinction. And now we’re fighting back” (Crawford 2016). Much of Assu’s work addresses issues such as Indigenous rights, consumerism, branding, new technologies, and the ways in which the past has come to inform contemporary ideas and identities.

Watch Sonny Assu discuss his exhibition “A Radical Mixing” at Canada Gallery, Trafalgar Square in London, England here:



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In an ongoing series of works entitled *Interventions on the Imaginary*, Sonny Assu overlays digital “tags” onto historical paintings by settler artists like Paul Kane, Edwin Holgate, and Emily Carr. His bright, often neon-hued graffiti of ovoids and formline shapes hover like spacecraft over the appropriated and often iconic, historical images he has selected. Historical paintings by Emily Carr, for example, are suddenly marked by both a spectre and a contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples. His gesture is a form of resistance and emphasizes Crosby’s notion of “the Imaginary Indian,” a Western notion that has positioned Indigenous peoples as inferior and as a vanishing race. This notion has plagued popular representations of Canada, such as those made famous by the Group of Seven and Emily Carr, and has worked to picture the land as empty and unoccupied, as *terra nullius*. Through Assu’s appropriation of these art historical images and their juxtaposition with graphic Indigenous formline and satirical titling, *Interventions on the Imaginary* interrupts and ultimately unsettles (art) histories of colonization.

One of the most recognizable visual styles of Northwest Coast Indigenous art is formline, which contains ovoid, U and S forms, and features continuous curvilinear lines that outline figures, fill shapes and abstract designs. Assu’s use of formline within the series contrasts with the genres of Western art history painting that he appropriates. Assu makes visible an important practice of Indigenous artistic innovation and cultural resilience, prioritizing it over Western narratives of settlement and “progress” depicted in the appropriated paintings’ backgrounds. His use of bold colours makes the ovoids all the more visible, the graphic neon colour pairings interrupting and unsettling the landscapes they hover over. For instance, in *Re-invaders* (2014), which appropriates Carr’s painting *Church at Yuquot* (formerly *Indian Church*), Assu inserts neon pink and purple ovoid and U-shapes over the church, suspended like space invaders as the title suggests. The positioning of the formline hovering over the historic white building is significant. Like a graffiti tag on a wall, the formline attaches a signature of Indigenous survivance on the landscape, or what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor explains as a radically active presence that moves beyond mere survival but connects to issues of sovereignty (2009).

In *What a Great Spot for a Walmart!* Assu appropriates Emily Carr’s *Graveyard Entrance, Campbell River* because it specifically depicts the graveyard in his grandmother’s village. Assu writes, “Today the geographical landscape of the graveyard entrance is dramatically different. However, a replica of the Thunderbird totem stands in a nearby band-owned commercial development. Just beyond the tree line in the background of this painting, a modern-day Walmart can be found. Although the store is not located in a culturally sensitive area, with this intervention I’m questioning the desire of First Nations to adopt colonial ways of consumerism, commerce and resource extraction as a means to provide a mode of income for their Nation(s). While I understand the need for and support a Nation’s mandate to build infrastructure to provide for the betterment of their people, I question what we might pave over in order to provide for our own” (Assu). Assu suggests that land continues to be colonized now, through processes of capitalism.

Curator Candice Hopkins locates Assu's interventions within the trajectory of Canadian art history:

*This repudiation of dominance, the resistance to narratives of nihilism, carries forward into Assu's recent series, Interventions on the Imaginary, which began as a playful intrusion of one culture's aesthetic practice into another. Brightly coloured ovoids descend, alien-like, into the picture plane of well-known paintings of the Northwest Coast by Emily Carr, Paul Kane and others. These paintings are almost entirely devoid of Indigenous people. Scholars such as Marcia Crosby have pointed out that what stands in for the absence of people, particularly in the work of Emily Carr, are signs of their demise: gravestones, memorial poles, and abandoned houses. The tongue-in-cheek titles for work in the Interventions series, including Spaced Invaders (2014) and What a Great Spot for Walmart! (2014), potentially obscure the deeper implications of what is initially proposed by these images—namely, making the Northwest Coast formlines appear strange and the paintings, done by the newcomers to the land, appear natural.*

*Growing up in the 1980s, Assu has stated interest in remix culture. This is found in the bold colour choices of his paintings that are more akin to the urban vernacular of the street than to the more muted palette of his ancestors. This isn't a new tactic. The American media scholar Henry Jenkins argues that "the story of American arts in the 19th century might be told in terms of the mixing, matching, and merging of folk traditions taken from various Indigenous and immigrant populations." This is also apparent in the paintings that Assu chooses as his source material. For Emily Carr, it wasn't enough to represent the landscapes and villages of Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchahnulth, Tsimshian, and Haida peoples; in her own form of cultural cannibalism, she quite literally became the other. For a time, she took on an Indigenous name, Klee Wyck. She also created works that took on the aesthetics broadly associated with Northwest Coast art, including ceramic bowls decorated with ravens, serpents, and turtles in a rather unsophisticated formline.*

*This being said, Interventions on the Imaginary challenges what is "natural" and what is a construct. While much of the early paintings of the Northwest Coast, including those by Carr, are described as landscapes, Marcia Crosby notes that "[Carr's] association of the material culture of the Northwest Coast native people with the 'primitive greatness of the West' was naturally facilitated by the already entrenched construction of the Indian as nature." Thus, the picture planes that Assu's ovoids descend upon and over, like spaceships from another planet, are anything but natural. They are images inscribed with power and the entanglement of colonial relations. In some, like the rather elaborately titled Yeah...shit's about to go sideways. I'll take you to Amerind. You'll like it, looks like home (2016), an ovoid hovers over a group of people seated in a circle in front of a big house, as though their own cultural forms have come back from the future to rescue them from Western painterly oblivion (Hopkins 2018, 25-27).*

VIEW SELECTED WORKS FROM BRENDAN TANG'S MANGA ORMOLU HERE

Figure 3.9 Brendan Tang, Manga Ormolu 4.0 (2012) Ceramic and mixed media, 24 × 53 × 9 23 cm.

Themes of encounter and cross-pollination are central to the work of Brendan Lee Satish Tang. Tang's ceramic works explore "issues of identity and the hybridization of our material and non-material culture while simultaneously expressing a love of both futuristic technologies and ancient traditions. Although he is primarily known for his ceramic work, Tang continues to produce and exhibit work in a wide variety of mixed and multiple mediums" (Tang).

Tang's own history is as hybrid as his objects. He was born in Dublin, Ireland to Trinidadian parents who are of Chinese and East Indian descent. Manga Ormolu 4.0 is part of a larger series of ceramics in which ancient Chinese porcelain vases and objects battle futuristic robotic parts. Art historian Anne Dymond describes Tang's work:

*Like Rococo ormolu—French gilded luxury fittings applied in the 18th century to imported Ming and Qing dynasty vases (among other objects) to make them more appealing to European aristocracy—Tang's vessels are the product of long and ongoing cultural interplay. Each piece begins*

*with what looks like a traditional hand-painted Chinese vase, mostly blue and white, complete with a delicate craquelure that suggests authenticity. Yet where Europeans framed the East by adding golden filigree, Tang anachronistically adds cyber-pop ceramic armatures, airbrushed to smooth perfection, which are simultaneously fun and menacing.*

*Tang relates the robotic references to Japanese comics and anime, which, like ormolu, are culturally complex. They evolved out of a combination of Western and Japanese traditions, became incredibly popular in Japan and are now, in some sense, global. Tang's work adds nuance to the seeming permanence of cultural archetypes, revealing the malleability of such categories in contemporary culture as well as their staying power. While manga is part of global pop culture, it still stubbornly reads as Japanese. Similarly, while the blue-and-white ceramics have been copied in Delftware and the Ming dynasty's blue glaze may have been imported from the West, they persist in signifying the Chinese (Dymond 2022).*

Watch *Anatomy of an Object: Manga Ormolu*, which takes a close look at Tang's Manga Ormolu series, here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=40#oembed-6>

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.10

The previous video provides a definition for ormolu. What is it? How does it relate to Tang's work? Consider what he is referencing in his sculptural artworks. How do you interpret this densely layered work? How does it connect to others you have seen in this module?



Figure 3.10 Brian Jungen, *Prototype for New Understanding #16*, 2004. Nike Air Jordans, human hair, 57 x 31 x 46 cm. Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

Brian Jungen is another artist whose multimedia sculptural artworks reveal an interest in hybrid combinations and eclectic mixes of materials from different cultures. Many of Jungen's artworks are made from cut-up, dismantled, and reconstructed objects found in our everyday lives: Nike basketball shoes, golf bags, plastic chairs, recycling bins, and gasoline jugs, to name just a few. Cutting up, disassembling, and recombining materials works to create new meaning out of often ordinary, everyday objects.

Watch this video from the *Art21* PBS series to learn more about Brian Jungen and his artistic practice: <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s8/brian-jungen-in-vancouver-segment/> (12 minutes)

Jungen's *Prototypes for a New Understanding* (1998-2005) is a series of twenty-three masks created by taking

apart Nike Air Jordan sneakers and putting them back together again with human hair to produce soft sculptures that resemble Indigenous Northwest Coast masks. Curator Kitty Scott writes,

*These forms have been understood as markers of cultural hybridity and critiques of consumerism and tidy ethnographic orders, as well as of the systems of museological display. In art-historical terms, these works may be broadly aligned with the neo-conceptual turn of the previous decade. More specifically, Jungen's strategy of working with objects from the dominant culture in order to re-signify those materials might be compared with the approaches of African American artists such as David Hammons, Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, or Fred Wilson. . . . Jungen would similarly turn toward popular culture and its representations of Indigeneity. The city of Vancouver had long incorporated generic motifs such as riffs on flat Haida formline designs, abstract renderings of thunderbirds and distinctive geometric forms into its civic identity, and Jungen was interested in how people perceived them without fully understanding what they were. At the same time Jungen was becoming interested in Air Jordans "as a collectible commodity, just like Native art" (Jungen). As he has stated, the Prototypes series is "about my experience of being First Nations and trying to figure out what that means at this time" (Enright). (Scott 2019, 15)*

Scott alludes to Jungen's *Prototypes* use of the black, red, and white colours of the classic Nike Air Jordan sneaker to evoke the colours of Haida masks and carvings, which have become ubiquitous on the West Coast and have come to stand in for much Indigenous art and visual culture in Canada. *Prototype for New Understanding #16* (2004) considers the immense cultural currency and rarity of sports paraphernalia (Air Jordans were costly in the 1980s and now command outrageous sums on eBay), and, by placing them in a gallery or museum, Jungen asks viewers to consider how we assign cultural value.

Basketball is as popular on First Nations reserves as anywhere, and the aspiration to the high style and high-level performance associated with Nike Air Jordans—a fashion made popular by 1980s rappers as well as aspiring athletes—is central to Jungen's commentary. Deconstructing these status objects calls their associated symbolism into question; it also deconstructs their cultural capital. Jungen performs a powerful gesture, a violent act that dismantles the high-priced shoe by literally ripping it apart, all the while calling into question the stereotypical representations of Indigenous cultures. The colours and shapes of the sneakers lend themselves particularly well to Northwest Coast imagery, the swoosh operating like the classic U-form and ovoid shapes associated with Northwest Coast formline design. The Prototypes are a critical commentary on the tourist trade in souvenir Indigenous masks, often made for a market economy, and clashes them with the over-priced, globally sought-after commodity of the Air Jordan shoe. These hybrid sculptures make connections between more "traditional" Northwest visual culture and popular sportswear fashion, calling into question the ways that we arbitrarily assign value to objects that have no direct connection to their original use, and transforming them into fetish objects.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 3.11

Find and do some research about one other artwork by Sonny Assu, Brendan Tang, or Brian Jungen that addresses the idea of encounter. Write a 200-word paragraph describing the work's form, subject matter, context, and meaning. How does the artwork that you have chosen address themes of encounter, exchange, or hybridity?

- Alison Ariss on Gina Grant, Helen Calbreath, Krista Point, Debra Sparrow and Robyn Sparrow, *Out of the Silence* (1997)
- Jennifer Burgess on the Inuvik Parka (1960-80)
- Emma Hassencahl-Perley on *O'Halloran's Outfit* (c. 1841)
- Michael Rattray on Ruth Cuthand, *Covid-19 Mask No. 6* (2020)
- Linda Sioui and Annette de Stecher on the Elgin Trays (1847-54)

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# LAND/SCAPE



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Figure 4.1 Françoise Sullivan. *Dance in the Snow (Danse dans la neige)*. 1948, from the album *Danse dans la neige* published by Françoise Sullivan in fifty copies, S.I. Images Ouareau (1977).

In February 1948 [Françoise] Sullivan set out for Otterburn Park, southeast of Montreal, where her artist friends Françoise Riopelle (b. 1927) and Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923–2002) lived. Dressed in a sweater, a long skirt, leggings, and fur-lined boots, she improvised *Dance in the Snow*. The sequence of movements was vigorous, suggesting a crescendo of emotions and raw energy. In the silence of the frosty day, Sullivan's broad gestures were echoed only by the crunching of her steps on the thick, rough layer of ice covering the snow. Riopelle filmed the performance, while Maurice Perron (1924–1999) photographed it. Perron's iconic pictures remain the only record of the event; Riopelle's film has been lost. The photos show Sullivan in arrested movement, her arms, legs, and torso stretching or curving expressively. Her body appears to levitate because of the lack of differentiation between foreground and background in the barren landscape (Gérin 2018).

## LEARNING JOURNAL 4.1

Land becomes landscape as we experience, mediate, and develop our own and cultural understandings of it. *Danse dans la neige* is a physical expression of this process by which the artist uses her body to feel and understand place. Experiencing land—be it a busy city block, a quiet courtyard, or a forested mountain peak—is something that unites the spatial and the sensorial. Go outside. Listen. Feel. Smell. Move. How are you experiencing the space around you through your senses? How does your movement impact your sensation of and relationship to the space around you?

## By the end of this module you will be able to:

- describe landscape in Canada as a product of historical processes, mediated by social and cultural values
- analyze the relationship of landscape as an artistic genre to nationalism, colonialism, and power relations
- identify different visual styles for representing the land as landscape
- recognize key artists and artworks produced in Canada that address landscape.

## It should take you:

**Dance in the Snow (*Danse dans la neige*)** Text 4 min, Video 4 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**Doctrine of discovery, settlement, and territorialization** Text 46 min, Video 20 min

**Land into landscape** Text 39 min, Video 23 min

**Environment and futurities** Text 24 min, Website 10 min

**The land remembers** Text 24 min, Website 10 min, Podcast 25 min

**Learning journals** 9 x 20 mins = 180 mins

**Total: approximately 7 hours**

## Key works:

- Figure 4.1 Françoise Sullivan, *Dance in the Snow (Danse dans la neige)* (1948)
- Figure 4.2 AY Jackson, *Terre Sauvage* (1913)
- Figure 4.3 Horatio N. Topley, *Vegetable display by J. Strasburgerca* (1910)
- Figure 4.4 Homer Watson, *The Stone Road* (1881)
- Figure 4.5 Edward Poitras, *Offensive/Defensive* (1988)
- Caroline Monnet, *Mobilize*, 2015
- Figure 4.6 Lucius O'Brien, *Sunrise on the Saguenay, Cape Trinity* (1880)
- Figure 4.7 Elizabeth Wynn Wood, *Northern Island* (1927)
- Figure 4.8 Elizabeth Wynn Wood, *Passing Rain* (1928)
- Figure 4.9 David Milne, *Painting Place III* (1930)
- Isabelle Hayeur, *Losing Ground* (2015)
- Figure 4.10 Charles Comfort, *Smelter Stacks, Copper Cliff*, 1936
- Figure 4.11 Yvonne McKague Housser, *Cobalt*, 1931
- Figure 4.12 Edward Burtynsky, *Nickel Tailings #34, Sudbury Ontario*, 1996

## Doctrine of discovery, settlement, and territorialisation

Land is many things: it is the ground that we rest on; it is the host and source of flora and fauna. It takes many forms, from sand to dirt to waterway, and many shapes, from deep river basins to mountain peaks.

Everyone has an experience and understanding of land. It gives us sustenance, healing, and hardship. Land can provide us with physical, familial, spiritual, and emotional connection, but it can also separate and divide us. While the land itself simply is, human understandings of the land are complex and layered. The stories we tell and the histories that play out across the land infuse it with meaning. Françoise Sullivan's performance, *Danse dans la neige*, is a playful but poignant reminder that the human meaning ascribed to land is mediated through human encounter and experience. In this way, conventions about how the land is visualized become as important as the land itself.

In Western studies of art, depictions of the land are generally referred to as landscapes. In this module, we complicate the idea of landscape as a Eurocentric mode of representation, while opening up our study to a wide range of knowledge, engagement, and representation of land. The key works in this module take us in three directions that often intersect and layer upon one another: human relationships with land as places of identity, survival, and territorialization; the ways that humans transform land into landscape through cultural, aesthetic,

and political understandings; and the ways that art can reveal and address issues that face land itself, such as climate change, consumption and waste, and resource exploitation.



Figure 4.2 A.Y. Jackson, *Terre Sauvage*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 128.8 x 154.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada. Reproduced by wikiart.

In the narrative of Canadian art history, the Group of Seven has occupied a central place. In part, this place comes out of the historical moment in which the group was painting in the early 20th century. Throughout the 19th century, painting in Canada was heavily influenced by European styles of art making. This makes sense, given the French and British colonial histories of the land, as well as waves of European immigration and settlement. Artists coming to Canada from Germany, for example, brought with them German Romantic modes of depicting the landscape, rich in detail and awe-inspiring vistas. Visiting British military topographers, trained in watercolour, produced sketches and notebooks replete with visual descriptions of land and settlement. Even into the 20th century, it was not uncommon for Canadian-born artists to travel to Paris or London to train in academic styles. Similarly, art displayed and sold in Canada was commonly European in either origin or style.

Much of the impetus for Canadian landscape painters in the early 20th century lay in the struggle against the dominance of European painting collected in Canada. Wealthy collectors in Toronto and Montreal often preferred to “spend \$5000 on an inferior Dutch painter than \$700 on a Canadian masterpiece” (Tippett 1990, 93). The “inferior Dutch painters” referred to were members of the Hague School, a designation given by the Dutch art critic Jacob Van Santen Kolft in 1875 to a group of artists active in and around The Hague in the last half of the 19th century. At the time, The Hague had not yet developed as a major industrial centre and the area provided an ideal environment for the artists of two generations to explore new ways of viewing and depicting their natural surroundings. During the “Grey Period,” the height of production spanning from the early 1870s to the late 1880s, the Hague School of painters worked in oil and watercolours to convey their intimate knowledge

of the Dutch landscape and its people. The group's muted palette of soft grays as well as browns and greens reflected the moist climate and northern environment of the Netherlands. Their preference for tonal color and an expression of a permanent peacefulness, instead of pure hues and fleeting moments, restricted these painters from identifying with French Impressionism; instead, the group has been more closely linked to the **en plein-air** production of the Barbizon School. As the popularity of the Barbizon School began to rise, works by Hague School artists were considered to be suitable alternatives to the increasingly scarce French works.

Although initially influenced by the Hague School during his travels through Europe, A.Y. Jackson later abandoned their subjects and style for a more "Canadian approach." Painters of The Hague School such as Mauve, Israels and the Maris brothers were emotionally invested in their own country's landscape, not in foreign vistas. Jackson seemed uncomfortable appropriating elements of their national identity, and is considered to have matured as an artist only when he was able to articulate himself as a Canadian painter, not as an imitator of Dutch art. He became, as one art historian noted, "as artistically faithful to the Canadian landscape as the Hague School had been to their native countryside" (Hurdalek 1983, 23). Both the Hague School painters and Canadian painters at the turn of the century were nationalistically motivated, "recognizing landscape and genre scenes as an ideological and psychological vehicle for defining a nation (Tobey 1991). The decline in interest in The Hague School helped pave the way for the rise of the Group of Seven, and their rebellion against European dominance of the Canadian arts as symbolized by the Hague School (Buis 2008).

The Group of Seven included Lawren S. Harris (the group's de facto leader), Franklin Carmichael, A.Y. Jackson, Frank H. Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and F.H. Varley. Tom Thompson is often linked with the group, though he passed away in 1917, shortly before the group was officially formed in 1920. Emily Carr was also invited to exhibit with the group on numerous occasions; later members included Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald and Edwin Holgate.

With a shared belief that a uniquely Canadian art style could emerge only through direct contact with its natural world, the artists carried out several expeditions together to northern Ontario, where they painted the forests and lakeshores they saw as the true spirit of Canada. These excursions into Algonquin and Killarney provincial parks contributed to the notion of the Group of Seven as painting raw wilderness undisturbed by human encounter, and lent them a perceived masculine fortitude and ruggedness that seemed required to access these remote places. The irony is that, of course, they were still influenced by European art movements, particularly Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. You can read about these movements and others here.

The title of Jackson's painting, perhaps more than the painting itself, reflects the ways in which the Group of Seven conceived of the Canadian landscape. Directly translated from French, *terre sauvage* means wilderness. But there is a linguistic cognate (words that sound or look similar in different languages and have a closely related meaning) to the English word *savage*, which comes with deeply rooted colonial connotations.

In the following excerpt from a 2007 volume, John O'Brian investigates and challenges the legacy of the Group of Seven on Canadian artistic practice:

*In the painting, the heavy autumn clouds that are lodged above the open blue sky and the long, bent horizon, a horizon punctured by red and green scatterings of trees, seem as fixed and unchangeable as the granite rocks they visually mirror in the foreground. It seems to me that the balanced weight of the clouds and the rocks still the image, so that only the faint curve of the rainbow on the left side of the painting hints at the ephemeral. The quality of stilling, or of timelessness, helped the painting to become an icon, a representation of nordicity and emptiness. Terra nullius. Jackson even carried the language of terra nullius into his title, whether he intended the connection or not. (O'Brian 2007, 26)*

As early as the 15th century, the Doctrine of Discovery was the legal framework that Spain, Portugal, and England used to enable colonization of land, including in North America. An international law gave license to explorers to claim vacant land, *terra nullius*, in the name of their monarch or sovereign. It was understood that vacant land was that which was not populated by Christians. Under this law, colonization extended beyond land to the often-violent subjugation of those who lived on it. What is now known as North America had, however, been populated by Indigenous peoples for tens of thousands of years before European colonization.

The land in Jackson's *Terre Sauvage* is characterized as raw, harsh wilderness, but also empty, unsettled, and ready to be brought under colonial law. The painting emerges from and perpetuates these colonial understandings of Canadian land. Members of the Group of Seven were not necessarily painting with the Doctrine of Discovery at the forefront of their minds, if at all, but in positioning the land in this manner, their landscapes became connected to Canadian identity and the colonial histories. The rhetoric of the vastness, emptiness, harshness, and northerness of the land—think of the national anthem's "Our true north, strong and free"—informed conceptions of Canadian identity as well as institutional and government policies. The National Gallery of Canada, for example, was eager to use the work of the Group of Seven in nation-building efforts. In his review of the 1918 Royal Canadian Academy of Arts exhibition, critic Harold Mortimer-Lamb wrote that *Terre Sauvage* was "one of the most important paintings of landscape yet produced by a Canadian artist, and more clearly expresses the spirit and feeling of Canada than anything that has yet been done" (NGC, "A.Y. Jackson: *Terre Sauvage*").

Watch this short National Film Board of Canada documentary from 1941, *Canadian Landscape*, which follows painter A.Y. Jackson on his canoe trips and on foot to the northern wilderness of Canada in autumn:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=130#oembed-2>

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 4.2

How does the video talk about, characterize, and describe the land? The narrator suggests that A.Y. Jackson has engaged in a "lifelong search into the meaning of the Canadian landscape." How does the video present Jackson's process as an artist and how does this process shape your understandings of his paintings as they present the land? When we think about the ideas presented by John O'Brian in his analysis of Jackson's *Terre Sauvage*, how might the film reinforce settler narratives of the land while minimizing other narratives?

While the painters of the Group of Seven were concerned with showing the land as wild and empty, the Canadian government was determined to demonstrate that the land was bountiful and manageable for settlement. To do this, they relied on survey photographers to use the relatively new medium of photography to document government-sponsored topographical and geological expeditions. The federal Department of the Interior was established in 1873 to administer and develop the newly acquired territories in the West. It included a Survey Branch, which was responsible for surveying and mapping land. "Photographs were used by surveyors, scientists, engineers, government officials, and even amateur naturalists as a way to inventory and process the land and its contents visually" (Cavaliere 2016, 15).



*Figure 4.3 Horatio N Topley (Topley Studio), Vegetable display by J. Strasburger, 1910. Photograph. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. This reproduction is a copy of the version available at [https://www.collectionscanada.ca/canadian-west/052920/05292048\\_e.html](https://www.collectionscanada.ca/canadian-west/052920/05292048_e.html).*

Horatio Needham Topley, a trained photographer, took his camera out of the photographic studio and onto the land, working for the Canadian Department of the Interior in 1887. Topley was the younger brother of William James Topley, who in 1872 became proprietor of a photographic studio renowned for photographic portraits. The studio photographed the dignitaries and politicians who lived, worked, and visited Canada's new capital city, Ottawa, photographing nearly 2,300 sitters a year at its height.

A copy of Topley's photograph above appears in one of several photographic albums compiled by the Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior between 1892 and 1917. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Canada recruited from predominantly European countries three classes of immigrants: farmers, agricultural workers, and domestic servants. Various policies under the

Immigration Act of the early 20th century both encouraged and regulated immigration, particularly of people classed by the government as well suited to Canada's harsh winters. The albums contain photographs relating to agriculture, railroads, ports, cities, and immigration. Here, the photograph shows a carefully arranged display of fruits and vegetables. Photographs like this one circulated in Europe in order to promote immigration to Canada and were crucial tools in this process.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 4.3

Describe the photograph. What do you see? How is it arranged? What is in the background? How are the people dressed? Think about what these details might reveal to you about the land. How might the government use this photograph to visually entice European immigrants to come to Canada in the early 20th century and to record successful immigration programs and policies?

Where the paintings of the Group of Seven and A. Y. Jackson depict the landscape as awe-inspiring and wild, photographs made in the same historical moment demonstrate that the land was plentiful and bountiful. It was the occupation, use, and settlement of land that justified colonial claim over land, a process often referred to as territorialization. This physical process was coupled with a sense of Canadian national identity rooted in the land: empty, rugged, and harsh. Canadians thus began to see themselves as rugged like the land, its emptiness there for the taking. Taken together, land became central to formations of settler-colonial Canadian identity which in turn helped justify colonization.

Homer Watson's *The Stone Road* was painted in 1881 and combines realistic elements, a nostalgia for a simple life, and a depiction of the physical fortitude of both the land and its early colonial settlers. Art historian Brian Foss describes how Watson's paintings address the idea of settlement:

*[Watson's paintings] depict the results of early nineteenth-century settlement by portraying nature harmoniously coexisting with the human presence. That presence could take many forms—people, farm animals, fences, crops, mills, and other buildings—but it was almost always there. Watson's paintings are in many ways Canadian art's most consistent and loving visual documentation of the pioneer legacy in*



Figure 4.4 Homer Watson, *The Stone Road*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 129.8 cm. National Gallery of Art, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikiart user yigruzeltitl.

*Ontario's historical sense of identity. Yet beneath their reassuring and often bucolic surfaces, Watson's landscapes raise difficult questions about the history of European settlement in Canada.*

*In recent years pioneers and settlers have become subjects of debate. Indigenous groups around the world demand that the descendants of pioneers recognize their status as members of privileged collectives. Settler societies tend to replicate their histories and beliefs in their new communities, often at the expense of Indigenous populations that substantially predate the arrival of non-Indigenous pioneers. The Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral (Attawandaron) peoples had been living in the Grand River area (including what later became Waterloo County) for centuries. Before the early nineteenth-century arrival there of the first pioneers, the British government formally granted the land extending six miles on either side of the full length of the river to the Haudenosaunee, in the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784; but First Nations title to the land continues to be disputed to this day.*

*During Watson's lifetime Europeans regarded pioneers and settlers as highly admirable people who homesteaded what was considered an empty wilderness. Rather than being viewed through a critical lens, pioneers were characterized almost entirely as having traits such as resilience, resourcefulness, an immense capacity for work, and an aversion to complaining about hardships. They stood for ideals of stability and human control. (Foss 2018)*

Land supports and encompasses life—the streams that flow through it, the plants that grow on it, the climate that is both generated by and alters it, and the people and animals that move across it. Art historian Keri Cronin reminds us of the importance of considering these multifaceted and interconnected aspects of land when we view art that represents land:

*In one of the best-known texts in Canadian art history, Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, he describes Watson's *The Stone Road* as having "tremendous strength" and suggests that "the curve of the road introduces just enough tension to keep the picture taut—frozen, as in a dream, with every iron-hard detail assuming great significance." What is absent from this discussion, of course, is close critical attention to the animals (human and nonhuman) who travel down the road referred to in the title. What can be said, for example, about the labour of nonhuman animals in 19th-century settler-colonial societies such as the one depicted here? (Cronin 2014)*



Have a look at Watson's artworks found on the website for the Homer Watson House in Kitchener, Ontario. Watson and his sister transformed this house into a small art gallery. Select an example of Watson's work from the website and consider Keri Cronin's idea of labour in the colonial process of settlement. Who or what is performing labour? What kinds of labour are taking place—agricultural, industrial, domestic? How is that labour presented visually? In a calm or serene way? In a harsh way? How does the land look? Welcoming? Hostile? What might Watson be presenting or communicating about rural Canadian land?

The land that artists such as Watson portray, which has been settled, colonized, and territorialized was, and continues to be, occupied by the many Indigenous nations who have lived on the land since time immemorial. Immigration and settlement were a colonial tactic to forcibly displace Indigenous nations and communities from the land. Likewise, the myth of a raw and empty landscape presented in works like Jackson's, which has been supported by institutions like the National Gallery of Canada as a uniquely Canadian form of art, has further perpetuated the erasure of Indigenous presence and histories on the land.

[VIEW IMAGES FROM EDWARD POITRAS'S \*OFFENSIVE/DEFENSIVE\* HERE](#)

*Figure 4.5 Edward Poitras. Offensive / Defensive, 1988. Silver, lead, pastel, photographs. Installed at Art museum, University of Toronto.*

Born in Regina, Edward Poitras is a Métis artist and a member of the Gordon First Nation, where he currently lives and works. For his conceptual artwork *Offensive/Defensive*, Poitras cut a rectangular strip of sod from his home on the George Gordon First Nation and another from the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He then switched the locations of the sod, replanting the strip from the gallery lawn on the reserve and vice versa. Buried beneath each strip, Poitras cast the words "offensive" and "defensive" in lead. Poitras's *Offensive/Defensive* addresses the theft of land and land rights, colonial history, the tensions between urban and rural life, and the binary of land and landscape. Read curator Gerald McMaster's assessment of *Offensive/Defensive*:

*Though the work was installed in two places simultaneously, it was part of a one-person show. The first part was installed just outside the Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; the second part appeared somewhere on the Gordon Indian Reserve. The work is notably deceptive. From the photograph we see two patches of grass: Poitras took one piece of prairie sod from the Reserve and placed it on the manicured lawn of the Gallery; he then took sod from the Art Gallery lawn out to the Reserve. What was the result? The urban sod on the Reserve died immediately; but it returned to life shortly thereafter. The Reserve sod at the Gallery, on the other hand, flourished quite nicely. Offensive/Defensive plays on at least two metaphors: identity and displacement. The metaphor of identity follows this logic: one's identity can remain relatively unaffected in urban environments; conversely, in the smaller rural/Reserve communities, identity may be more problematic than meets the eye. As well, it indicates the (un)sustainability of identities in different spaces (urban and rural). The metaphor of displacement highlights having to move from one place to another, and the sense of feeling out of place in urban environments, even though they have their advantages. [...] Offensive/Defensive implies that the issues surrounding land involve a constant struggle. In Canada, land claims have become big business as aboriginal people are now gaining real estate, and in doing so, are also exercising their cultural affinities once again. In other cases, aboriginal land claims are becoming an issue for the surprised urban dweller, as urban areas are now being targeted for claims. Now the Indians are on the "offensive." Finally, this work is about centre and periphery, saying that in fact, in every centre there is a periphery, and vice versa. For example, it used to be that reserves were the outposts, the "backwater." This was before the identity-conscious sixties and seventies when so many young aboriginal people were wanting to "go back" to the land. This meant going to reserves and other aboriginal communities in*



search of identity and to be identified. In effect, they were returning to the centre. These new centres have since begun to position themselves as such. Culturally, they are flourishing. The deceptiveness of this piece renders the question of who is on the offensive or defensive, a constantly shifting one, making the work even more powerful and effective. (McMaster 1999)

Look at Edward Poitras's *Offensive/Defensive*, particularly the photographic components, which were included in the 2019 exhibition *In & Out of Saskatchewan* at the University of Toronto Art Centre: <https://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Saskatchewan-exhibition-documentation-2019.pdf>

Caroline Monnet is a multidisciplinary artist of Anishinaabe and French heritage. Her short film, *Mobilize* (2015), consists of archival footage from the National Film Board and takes the viewer on a journey from the far north to the urban south, over all kinds of landscapes and conditions. As the artist writes, “Hands swiftly thread sinew through snowshoes. Axes expertly peel birch bark to make a canoe. A master paddler navigates icy white waters. In the city, Mohawk ironworkers stroll across steel girders, almost touching the sky, and a young woman asserts her place among the towers. The fearless polar punk rhythms of Tanya Tagaq’s *Uja* underscore the perpetual negotiation between the modern and traditional by a people always moving forward” (Monnet). Watch the film here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=130#oembed-3>

According to Monnet, *Mobilize* is about “how Indigenous people were instrumental in shaping Canadian society, to the extent of building skyscrapers in our city. It was about saying our presence as Indigenous people can no longer be ignored” (Cunningham).

Sarah E.K. Smith and Carla Taunton’s essay “Unsettling Canadian Heritage: Decolonial Aesthetics in Canadian Video and Performance Art” describes Monnet’s work:

*In a recent work, she employs the holdings of the NFB, a venerated Canadian institution that has created still and moving images of Canada since its founding in 1939. . . . Monnet’s 2015 video Mobilize (3 min.) was commissioned as part of the NFB’s Souvenir series. . . . To create the work Monnet employed a range of footage from numerous NFB titles. She sampled clips from films including well known titles such as Cree Hunters of Mistassini (1974), César et son canot d’écorce / César’s Bark Canoe (1970), High Steel (1965), Indian Memento (1967) (Janisse 2015). In working with the archive, Monnet employs techniques of montage and pastiche to intercut, juxtapose, and deconstruct archival footage, as well as playing with timing to speed up and down the original footage. . . . Mobilize foregrounds labour and movement through the juxtaposition of footage to create an open-ended and ambiguous narrative. In Mobilize, movement is both literal and metaphorical—evidenced through clips of snowshoes, canoes, boats, planes, and subways, as well as the move between the rural northern climate and the urbanized south. The idea of progression and futurity is addressed through footage of the skilled creation of heritage objects, including snowshoes and canoes. The work is a positive, upbeat and quick-paced short that brings together a range of archival footage in a manner that invokes a journey. The film employs footage that emphasizes the rhythms of and knowledge derived from the land (Janisse 2015).*

A key element of the video is the soundtrack; the footage is set to “Uja,” a song by Polaris Prize-winning Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq, featured on her 2014 album *Animism*. “Uja” is an enthralling, rhythmic song with an increasing beat. Tagaq’s pulsating, quick breath sounds give *Mobilize* a sense of urgency, and the pacing of the song also echoes the physical exertion of the individuals depicted. . . . Monnet’s use of a song by a contemporary Indigenous artist, Tagaq, who employs Inuk throat singing, also helps to foreground an Indigenous world view in the video.

The pace of *Mobilize* is apparent from the very beginning of the film. Against a quick beat, the work opens with a focused shot of hands, grasping the frame of a snowshoe as they bind the wood together, lacing it. The footage quickly jumps to a scene of a figure shot from the knees down, walking on finished snowshoes. The video jumps back and forth between hands and use, making, moving, all flashing by in pace with the increasing tempo of the beat. Slowly the focus zooms out so that the face of the female maker and the body of the snowshoe-clad figure are visible. This emphasis on bodies and the shift between the representation of skill and mobility repeats throughout the video.

Subsequently, the viewer is presented with footage of physical labour in the woods, tasks including chopping a tree, removing bark, framing a birch bark canoe, all intercut with footage of a man paddling a canoe. Here, the vantage point of the footage is dynamic, changing from the bow of the boat (looking toward the figure), to a sightline from the perspective of the man navigating waterways (looking outwards at the water). These perspectives are fragmented because different clips have been edited together. Nonetheless, the choppy footage gives a sense that the viewer is in the boat and moving forward. *Mobilize* quickly covers ground from the wooded location and waterways. Next, footage shows a motorized boat approaching a northern community by water. A snowmobile covers territory on the ground as we see houses in a rural community, with clean laundry hanging on lines between the homes. Footage shows children at play, enjoying string games. Subsequently the video is intercut with images of wolves in a snowy landscape, evoking wilderness. Then we are brought back to the waterway with footage of the canoe, a disjointed journey sped up to an impossible speed, as the canoe deftly navigates the water.

As Tagaq’s song peaks, the video depicts a more urban setting evidenced by footage of ironworkers constructing a skyscraper and shots of Inuktitut syllabics being used on a typewriter. A floatplane arrives and then takes off. The now frantic pace of the song resonates with the footage of the Montreal subway, with cars arriving and departing as the clips flicker in a disjointed fashion. Near the end of the work, we see the final protagonist of the film, a young Indigenous woman with a modern short haircut, dressed in a 1960s style green dress. The woman is, in fact, one of the Indigenous women from across Canada who were trained as the hostesses for the Indians of Canada Pavilion—depicted in *Indian Memento*. Her inclusion is a reference to the pavilion’s history as a key site for Indigenous self-representation, activism, and social justice. She alludes to the modernity and optimism of the exposition, as well as the nostalgia and ceremony imbued in the Canadian centennial. She walks the streets of Montreal, her path interspersed with clips of urban transportation—the streets, cars, subways, all revealing the movement and vitality of the city.

As the work concludes, the video slows, focusing on the woman’s contemplative face in the city. Describing *Mobilize*, Monnet recounts the video as urgent and intense (Janisse 2015). In employing footage of Indigenous peoples from the NFB archives, Monnet recontextualizes representations that have lost resonance in the contemporary moment. In doing so, she creates a new narrative that speaks to possibility and futurity. Monnet explains the importance of the contemporary in *Mobilize*: “This is what I wanted to create: a film where people feel that Indigenous people are very much alive, moving forward, anchored in today’s reality, vibrant and contemporary” (Dam 2015 ). Specifically, Monnet explains *Mobilize* as a “call for action,” noting that skilled cultural production like the creation of snowshoes in the video is a means to mobilize skills, as well as bodies. In her words, “... It’s also about

*being capable of movement, mobilizing ourselves to keep moving forward and encouraging people to act for political and social change” (Janisse 2015). (Smith and Taunton 2018, 330-32)*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 4.5

After reading the previous excerpt from Sarah E.K. Smith and Carla Taunton’s essay “Unsettling Canadian Heritage: Decolonial Aesthetics in Canadian Video and Performance Art,” consider how *Mobilize* counters stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples in Canada and addresses the centrality of land to Indigenous identity and colonialism. How does *Mobilize* make a case for cultural continuity between historic and contemporary Indigenous practices? What and whose perspectives are privileged? How is the film an example of self-determined Indigenous representation? What is the role of land and landscape in the film?

## Land into landscape

If land is the actual physical earth—the dirt and rock upon which plants, animals, and humans grow—then landscape can be understood as any human construction or understanding of land. This can be seen most clearly, perhaps, in landscape as an artistic genre or subject; a means for artists to interpret the land, employing individual creativity, styles, or modes. Landscapes are as old as human history and their making spans the globe. The term landscape, however, came into use in the English language in the 17th century specifically for works of art, though it was quickly taken up as a word used to describe vistas in other creative forms such as poetry and literature.

The creation of a landscape is influenced by all kinds of collective and individual philosophical, emotional, social, and political motivations that shape the final style or form of a work. In 18th- and 19th-century European art making, dominant approaches to landscape include the Picturesque, characterized by orderly beauty, and the Romantic, characterized by awe-inspiring and sometimes overwhelming vistas referred to as sublime, and later Impressionism, a sensory study of light and colour. These styles made their way to Canada through the movement of settlers, and influenced the ways that artists interpreted the land into the Canadian landscape.

In this section, we will look at four works made between 1880 and 2015. All four works transform the land into Canadian landscape through a different aesthetic lens that has been shaped by European modes such as the Picturesque, Romanticism, or Impressionism. While all four are distinct—two paintings, a sculpture, and a film—they are all concerned in some way with qualities of form, such as light, composition, colour, and texture, and provide distinct aesthetic interpretations that turn the dirt and rocks of the land into an aestheticized and politicized Canadian landscape. It is important to point out that while form and beauty play a large role in this process, landscape, unlike land, is not inert or neutral. Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell encourages us to understand landscape not as a noun (a thing) but as a verb (an action). In this way the verb “to landscape” connotes a particular privileging of certain ideas and perspectives over others in understanding land, and views landscape as an instrument of power:

*The aim of this book is to change “landscape” from a noun to a verb. It asks that we think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed. The study of landscape has gone through two major shifts in this century: the first (associated with modernism) attempted to read the history of landscape primarily on*

*the basis of a history of landscape painting, and to narrativize that history as a progressive movement toward purification of the visual field; the second (associated with postmodernism) tended to decenter the role of painting and pure formal visibility in favor of a semiotic and hermeneutic approach that treated landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes. I call the first approach “contemplative” because its aim is the evacuation of verbal, narrative, or historical elements and the presentation of an image designed for transcendental consciousness—whether a “transparent eyeball,” an experience of “presence,” or an “innocent eye.” The second strategy is interpretative and is exemplified in attempts to decode landscape as a body of determinate signs. It is clear that landscapes can be deciphered as textual systems. Natural features such as trees, stones, water, animals, and dwellings can be read as symbols in religious, psychological, or political allegories; characteristic structures and forms (elevated or closed prospects, times of day, positioning of the spectator, types of human figures) can be linked with generic and narrative typologies such as the pastoral, the georgic, the exotic, the sublime, and the picturesque.*

*Landscape and Power aims to absorb these approaches into a more comprehensive model that would ask not just what landscape “is” or “means” but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice. Landscape, we suggest, doesn’t merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions. Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. Thus, landscape (whether urban or rural, artificial or natural) always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which “we” (figured as “the figures” in the landscape) find—or lose—ourselves. An account of landscape understood in this way therefore cannot be content simply to displace the illegible visibility of the modernist paradigm in favor of a readable allegory; it has to trace the process by which landscape effaces its own readability and naturalizes itself and must understand that process in relation to what might be called “the natural histories” of its own beholders. What we have done and are doing to our environment, what the environment in turn does to us, how we naturalize what we do to each other, and how these “doings” are enacted in the media of representation we call “landscape” are the real subjects of Landscape and Power. (Mitchell 1994, 1-2)*



Figure 4.6 Lucius R. O'Brien, *Sunrise on the Saguenay, Cape Trinity*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 90 x 127 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikimedia users Musée des beaux-arts du Canada and The AMICA Library.

Consider the power dynamics of landscape as a genre in relation to Lucius O'Brien's 1880 painting, *Sunrise on the Saguenay*. O'Brien's painterly style was greatly influenced by a movement that was happening in the United States called Luminism that was characterized by effects of light in landscapes, such as reflective water and a soft, hazy sky; attention to detail and the suppression of brushstrokes; and an emphasis on tranquility and calm. Luminism comes out of Romantic aesthetic traditions in that its ultimate goal was to evoke an emotional reaction from viewers.

Read Dennis Reid's essay in *Canadian Art* about the importance of *Sunrise on the Saguenay, Cape Trinity* which entered the National Gallery of Canada's collection in 1880, the same year the gallery was founded.

O'Brien painted locations that he passed through as he traveled westward across the newly minted Canadian nation (recall that Canadian Confederation had occurred only 13 years earlier, in 1867). Many artists in this moment worked and traveled in the same way. In part, this was because artists believed their role was to visually record the land and express something unique about Canadian identity through the land. Settler-

Canadians were eager to view these types of paintings as a way to access vistas of their new (to them) country and were inspired by landscapes such as O'Brien's that were grand, beautiful, and moving. In short, *Sunrise on the Saguenay* was meant to instill a sense of national pride. In fact, O'Brien is known to have remarked to Prime Minister Charles Tupper, "Suppose that instead of Exhibiting Canadian art, Canadian artists should help to represent Canada by such portrayal as they can give of the picturesque aspects of her scenery and life. Pictures and drawings of Canadian life and scenery would have in this connection, an interest due to the subject & would materially help to make the country known and understood" (NGC, Lucius O'Brien). This idea of national identity manifest through imagery of the land is seen in O'Brien's appointment as art editor of a two-volume book project called *Picturesque Canada: The Country as It Was and Is* (1882), which made views of remote parts of the land even more accessible and sought after.

Engage with *Picturesque Canada: The Country as It Was and Is* by thumbing through the digitized pages. Pay close attention to the visual style through which the land is presented and how the accompanying text describes it.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 4.6

Think about how W.J.T. Mitchell emphasizes that we should focus not on "what landscape 'is' or 'means' but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice. Landscape, we suggest, doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is." Take a close and lingering look at *Sunrise on the Saguenay*. Describe it formally: How would you describe it to someone who could not see it? Is it realistic? Detailed? Abstract? Ask yourself how these formal qualities make you feel: Calm? Moved? In awe? What is in the painting and from whose perspective: What kind of boats? For what might sunrise be a metaphor? Who is telling the story and what story are they telling? Think about how the formal description that you've provided influences the work as "an instrument of cultural power." It is aesthetically alluring, yes, but does it tell you something about the colonial context in which it was painted? And what about its place in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada?

Lucius O'Brien's spent his painting career exploring landscapes all across Canada. In contrast, Elizabeth Wynn Wood, who worked many decades after O'Brien was part of a larger movement that attempted to connect Canadian identity to the small geographical region of Northern Ontario.

Elizabeth Wynn Wood remarked about land and sculptural form:

*Sculptural form is not the imitation of natural form any more than poetry is the imitation of natural conversation . . . While a piece of sculpture may contain visual forms with which we are acquainted by daily experience, it is essentially a design worked out by means of the juxtaposition of masses in space, just as poetry is a design wrought by the sounds of words in time.* (NGC, Elizabeth Wynn Wood)

Wood lived and worked in Toronto, and was part of the close-knit artistic circle that included the Group of Seven, whose paintings had by the mid-1920s epitomized a distinct Canadian visual idiom that connected



the empty northern Ontario wilderness with Canadian identity (as you have read about in A.Y. Jackson's *Terre Sauvage*). Wood achieved both critical and popular success in her lifetime—not an easy feat for Canadian artists in the early 20th century! As the art critic Jehanne Biétry Salinger wrote in 1931 of Wood's aesthetic, "The bareness of [her] style offers a unique contribution to the aesthetic life of Canada" (Art Gallery of Ontario). We can see the "bareness" of Wood's simplified style in works like *Northern Island* (1927) and *Passing Rain* (1928). Where conservative art critics had hitherto prized an artists' ability to achieve a physical likeness to life, Wood (like other modern sculptors such as Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi) challenged convention, abstracting elements from nature into pared-down shapes and forms to evoke the essence of a scene, object, or figure.

[VIEW ELIZABETH WYNN WOOD'S NORTHERN ISLAND HERE](#)

*Figure 4.7 Elizabeth Wynn Wood, Northern Island (1927) Orsera marble, cast tin on black glass base, 22.5 x 37.7 x 20.8 cm with base. National Gallery of Canada.*

[VIEW ELIZABETH WYNN WOOD'S PASSING RAIN HERE](#)

*Figure 4.8 Elizabeth Wynn Wood, Passing Rain (1928) Carved 1929, Orsera marble, 81.3 x 107.3 x 20.1 cm. National Gallery of Canada.*

Elizabeth Wynn Wood was a sculptor and teacher from Orillia, Ontario. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art (OCA) in 1925 where she studied under Group of Seven members Arthur Lismer and J.E.H. MacDonald as well as her future husband, Emanuel Hahn. She was a founding member of the Sculptors Society of Canada in 1928 and the Canadian Arts Council, and was made a member of the Royal Academy of Canadian Arts. She spent time studying at the Art Student League in New York City, where the influence of ancient Egyptian art greatly influenced the direction of sculptures, leading to her simplified, modernist interpretation of subjects ranging from figures like Linda, munitions factory girls, and perhaps the subject she is best known for now: the landscape. After her study at the OCA she began to focus almost entirely on sculpture, rendering in three dimensions the rugged Canadian landscapes she knew best—the low-lying rock islands of Lake Couchiching and the smooth granite ridges seen along the Pickerel River, where she spent many summers.

Wood stood out for her exploration of landscape in sculptural form, combining the forms of rocks, water, and trees in her own distinctive language, using uncommon materials like tin. In *Northern Island*, a solitary windswept tree is perched on a single smooth rock cast in tin (which does not tarnish or rust) and placed on a sheet of black glass to suggest water. Tin as an ingredient of bronze was a typical sculptural material at the time, but using tin on its own was Wood's innovation (LeBourdais 1945, 20).

In 1929, the stock market crash shattered the already-slim market for public sculpture and triggered the decade's subsequent hard times. To help make ends meet, and despite laws prohibiting married women from working if their husbands could support them, Wood began teaching at Toronto's Central Technical School in 1930. Gender informed Wood's interest in producing works such as *Munitions Worker* (1944), which immortalized women's contributions to the war effort on the home front. Wood emerged as a sculptor at the apex of the Group of Seven's fame. In feminist terms, Wood's landscape sculptures may have been a strategy to gain acceptance in a male-dominated art world in Canada, where landscape was by then a widely established genre. It seems that Wood believed it would be easier to establish herself by adopting popular aesthetic trends with her sculpture, and in this choice she was not alone; many artists in the 1920s and 30s explored landscape in their work because the ground had been laid for landscape as a dominating force in art exhibitions already. Comparing Wood's work to the Group of Seven's Post-Impressionist aesthetic, however, demonstrates that her approach to representing the land is remarkably different, her sculptures original in their own right.

Wood's training with members of the Group of Seven, her art community, the discourse on landscape in Toronto, and her own art practice prompted Wood to engage in contemporary debates about the role of the artist in the social world, and the debates that were ramping up about landscape art versus figurative art in Canada. In a popular periodical, *Forum*, university professor and social critic Frank Underhill argued that the various international crises in the thirties (related in many places, like Spain, to communism and democracy) were pushing American and European artists to engage with political and communist themes in their artworks,

while he felt that Canadian artists were engaged in “rustic rumination,” meaning they were not confronting the social and political realities of the world. Wood weighed in with her own article attacking Underhill in *Forum* in February 1937. Entitled “Art and the Pre-Cambrian Shield,” Wood argued that “one cannot view everything in terms of politics and economics,” which she considered merely the “plumbing and heating” of society (Carney 105). She defended the long-standing centrality of landscape in English-Canadian art, asking “What should we do instead? Paint castles in Spain—crumbling?” A few months later the Canadian painter Paraskeva Clark responded to Wood’s essay, taking issue with what Clark saw as an abiding individualism that could not be sustained given the socialist fights taking place around the world (Clark).

The relevance of landscape versus human-centred subjects was hotly debated in the 1930s and Wood, too, participated in such debates. The following excerpt by Lisa Panayotidis outlines Wood’s engagement with Underhill and Clark on the place of the artist in society:

*Wynn Wood deemed Underhill’s comments to be not only an attack on the freedom of artistic practice and expression but specifically on a younger group of artists, who the outspoken professor in essence pronounced as isolationists, derivative, and devoid of original ideas. The artist countered with a February 1937 article in the Forum, “Art and the Canadian Shield,” in which she dismissed Underhill as “riding a presently fashionable wave, wherein the idea of art as propaganda, serving the party, diarizing current experience, is easy to comprehend and insist upon. It is a mild epidemic of the Early Christian Martyr – Communist – Oxford Group fever which demands the consecration of all talent to the services of a readily recognizable cause.” Those artists, Wyn Wood pointed out, “had some doubt about the importance of civilization.” In walking off to the “hinterland,” the Canadian artist was, according to her, seeking “reality” and expressing his/her displeasure with society, arguing that the “gadgets and the civilization . . . somehow [are] not the be-all either of life or culture.” She outlined a dichotomised separation between the city (civilization) and the wilderness (the divine), heralding the wilderness as the space that sustains the artist through spiritual stimulation and nourishment. “Therefore, it should not surprise [Underhill] . . . that the artist should remain unimpressed by the dissolution.” (Panayotidis 2022)*

Like Elizabeth Wynn Wood, David Milne was a contemporary of the Group of Seven. Yet unlike the Group of Seven, Milne was not interested in creating art that evoked a uniquely Canadian style. He was born in rural Ontario in 1882 and moved to New York to study at the the Art Students League in 1904. His studies were interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, when he joined the Canadian army in 1917 as a war artist and was sent to Europe to paint the battlefields in France and Belgium for the Canadian War Memorials program. As a result of his wartime experiences, Milne became withdrawn from city life, seeking out the solitude of the Adirondack Mountains in Vermont and later moving back to Ontario. Milne moved frequently and the effects of the various places he lived had an impact on his artistic practice. “In 1929, Milne returned permanently to Canada, first settling in Temagami, then Weston, then at Palgrave, Six Mile Lake, Toronto, Uxbridge, and finally at Baptiste Lake near Bancroft, Ontario. A change in place for Milne always resulted in a change of colour, form, and theme in his work” (NGC, David Milne).





Figure 4.9 David Milne, *Painting Place III*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 51.3 cm x 66.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikimedia user National Gallery of Canada.

Milne's style was influenced by Post-Impressionism and Fauvism, evident in his bold and expressive use of colour, albeit often dark or muddled. In thinking about the ways that land is transformed into landscape, Milne's focus was not the pursuit of a national vision, but rather something that was filtered through a deeply personal lens. Milne didn't paint the "untamed" and sweeping landscapes so common with the Group of Seven and Lucius O'Brien; instead, he painted his own lived experience of land that often show traces of the artist himself. In *Painting Place III* we see the artist's tools laid out on, but inseparable from, the land. Megan Jenkin's describes Milne's work:

*The paintings he produced after returning to Canada feel grim. He worked mostly in muddled blacks and browns, preoccupied with soil and mine*

*runoff, and he created elaborate abstractions of the backcountry: white waterfalls, collapsed mine pits, dark reflective lakes. In all these tensions—between time spent in Canada and England, between war and peace, between life in New York and Temagami, between light and dark, colour and line—his oeuvre creates a portrait of the artist himself. His was a mind through which international visual idioms and Eastern Canadian wilderness coalesced into a Canadian modernism, important for its uniqueness and its innovation. As the exhibition's co-curator, Sarah Milroy, noted at the opening, Milne, more than any other modern painter, taught her to appreciate the Eastern Canadian landscape—not by looking out over the horizon, but by looking straight down at muddled forest floors. (Jenkins 2018)*

Balancing personal and national concerns around land, Isabelle Hayeur, who lives and works in Montreal, is known for her large digital photomontages, videos and site-specific installations. Having lived in a suburb for some twenty years, a number of her artworks address the sad spectacle of urban sprawl and suburbia as ruins in reverse. Her approach is tied to her personal experience and draws from discourses about environmental issues and land-use planning. *Losing Ground* was filmed in Quartier DIX30 in Brossard, Quebec, the biggest and first "lifestyle centre" in Canada. The video reveals how local suburban and rural realities are increasingly marked by identical housing developments, retail complexes, shopping arcades and urban villages. Quarter DIX30 was designed to emulate an urban or downtown shopping experience for suburban dwellers living on the South Shore of Montreal. As well as shops and department stores, Quartier DIX30 includes a theatre, office towers, a hotel, a medical clinic, a toy superstore, and a spacious heated underground parking lot with 2000 free spaces. Hayeur critiques such urban sprawl and the resulting erosion and homogenization of rural environments. The slow pace of the film and the heightened sound mix aestheticize this otherwise banal space, proposing that this horizontal urbanization has an aesthetic allure, while simultaneously criticizing the way it eats away at landscapes and standardizes them. Watch Hayeur's *Losing Ground* here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=130#oembed-4>

In this section we have looked at the ways that artists transform or explore the transformation of land into landscape through distinct visual approaches that often reflect an idea, attitude, or outlook about the land. Each artist from Lucius O'Brien to Isabelle Hayeur has aestheticized the landscape, showing viewers the power and allure of the land around us. Get creative by going outside and photographing, sketching, painting, or sculpting the land that you see—a park, your balcony or backyard, the street, urban or remote spaces. Think about the decisions you are making in representing that land visually: are there people and animals? Are there elements of the built environment? What colours are you using? What is included and excluded? In a short paragraph, write down what those formal decisions might signal to you about your own understanding and relationship to the land, and how you think viewers might react to your artwork.

## Environment and futurities

Canadian art and art history are haunted by romantic ideas of this land as northern, empty, and white, and in this section, we look at work by modernist painters Charles Comfort and Yvonne McKague Housser, whose representations of mining challenge this romanticism. They remind us that mining was a key component of industrial modernity in Canada, instigating the shift from an agricultural to an industrial nation. Minerals like nickel, copper, and silver were important here at home as well as being important export goods, and at the same time their exploitation was linked to profiteering, much conflict, and environmental destruction.

Public and media interest in climate change has increased exponentially in recent years. We have seen wildfires ignite across the globe, growing bigger every year, ocean levels rising, and entire ecosystems collapsing. Artists, too, have begun to turn their attention to the ways that human intervention in the land for resource extraction has transformed the landscape. Art historian Karla McManus has noted that the anthropocene is “the single most defining force on the planet and that the evidence for this is overwhelming. Terraforming of the earth through mining, urbanization, industrialization and agriculture; the proliferation of dams and diverting of waterways; CO2 and acidification of oceans due to climate change; the pervasive presence around the globe of plastics, concrete, and other technofossils; unprecedented rates of deforestation and extinction: these human incursions. . . are so massive in scope that they have already entered, and will endure in, geological time” (McManus). In this section, we will also examine the scars of modern life on the earth in Edward Burtynsky's large-scale photographs that inspire both awe and a sense of devastation.



*Figure 4.10 Charles Comfort, Smelter Stacks, Copper Cliff, 1936. Oil on board, 25.4 x 30.5cm. National Gallery of Canada. Uploaded by Tumblr user icanwonder.*

Charles Comfort was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1900; he moved with his family to Winnipeg when he was 12, and then to Toronto in 1925. He was a commercial artist, landscape and portrait painter, printmaker, muralist, teacher and arts administrator. Comfort saved money to attend the Art Students League of New York under Robert Henri and Euphrasius Tucker. Working part-time for Brigidens commercial studio, he was temporarily transferred to Toronto in 1919. While in Toronto, Comfort joined the Arts and Letters Club, taking life-study classes and meeting members of the Group of Seven. Comfort visited the Group's inaugural 1920 exhibition, which inspired him to work on landscape paintings, a theme he continued throughout his lifetime. He helped initiate Canada's WWII War Art program and served as an official war artist in World War II, producing some of the best paintings by a Canadian artist of these events. He was one of the organizers of the 1941 Kingston Conference, a meeting of Canadian artists to discuss the role of art in society as well as other issues facing the arts at the time. Furthermore, he was a founding member of the Federation of Canadian Artists and contributed to the 1951 Massey Report, which led to the founding of the Canada Council, an organization that Comfort helped establish. After the war, Comfort served as Director of the National Gallery of Canada from 1960 to 1965. He was also a founding member of the Canadian Society of Graphic Art, the Canadian Society of

Painters in Water Colour, and the Canadian Group of Painters, and he held executive positions in a number of arts organizations.

His ordered landscapes bear the influence of the American Precisionists like Charles Scheeler, Joseph Stella and Charles Demuth. He was first introduced to the work of these American painters at the 1927 exhibition of the Société Anonyme at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now Art Gallery of Ontario), an exhibition that influenced many Canadian artists, including Comfort. He was especially inspired by Joseph Stella's futurist *Brooklyn Bridge*, among others. In 1932, he was commissioned to create his first of many murals for Toronto's North American Life Building, and he later taught mural-painting at the Ontario College of Art. In 1933, he met the American Precisionist Charles Sheeler, an encounter which many suggest influenced his painting, *Tadoussac* (1935).

In *Smelter Stacks, Copper Cliff*, we see a very industrial landscape of smelter stacks at a nickel mine just outside of Sudbury, Ontario. The scene is rendered in Comfort's simplified modernist style; the stacks—geometric minimalist vertical lines—are dwarfed by a massive and imposing sky. This was one of several panels and sketches focused on this site-specific project commissioned by Inco Limited. In this tight composition, Comfort situates the iconic smelting stacks at the centre of the composition, with the billowing smoke dramatically filling the sky and swirling to the upper edges of the composition, highlighting both the beauty and danger of the mining industry. The painting is also in stark contrast to the commercial design work which sustained Comfort. The graphic work he produced for mining and railway companies often glorified these industries, but here the mine is offered for aesthetic consideration. Unlike the Group of Seven's empty "wilderness," Comfort shows viewers the industry that was pivotal to Canada's early nation-building.



Figure 4.11 Yvonne McKague Housser, *Cobalt*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 114.8 x 140 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Flickr user BLOB (*Physarum polycephalum*).

A contemporary of Charles Comfort, Yvonne McKague Housser studied at the Ontario College of Art from 1915 to 1920, where she also taught after her studies until 1949. She studied in Paris and Mexico under Hans Hofmann and Emil Bistram. Influenced by the Group of Seven's interest in the landscape, Housser's exploration of the genre is entirely her own. She made numerous sketching trips throughout her career, traveling to the Rockies, Quebec, Northern Ontario, Mexico and the Caribbean. *Cobalt* shows an affinity with the Group of Seven, with richly-coloured houses and glacier-like tailings. The artist discovered the town of Cobalt on a trip in 1917 when she was still a student and was instantly drawn to its architecture and the mining shafts you see in the background. They looked romantic to her, like a castle on a hill of slag heaps. As curator Joan Murray writes, "The town, founded in 1904, had a rough-and-ready quality. The houses, the twisting streets, the rocks set crazily on cliffs and hills, all seemed to be distributed helter-skelter. When Housser first saw Cobalt, it was still a strong producer of silver: its age of greatest prosperity was from 1907 to 1920. By 1930, its more than thirty mines were deserted, and the town a graveyard" (Murray 68). The decline of the industry captured Housser's imagination, and she returned to the town and the subject of its mines and industry again and again.

The subject and themes in both Comfort and McKague Housser's paintings resonate in the work of



contemporary photographer, Edward Burtynsky, whose large-scale photographs of nature transformed by industry we will look at next.



Figure 4.12 Edward Burtynsky, *Nickel Trailings #34*, Sudbury Ontario, 1996. Chromogenic colour print, 76 x 102 cm. © Edward Burtynsky, courtesy Edward Burtynsky.

Nature transformed through industry is a central theme in Edward Burtynsky's work. One of Canada's best-known and most celebrated photographers, Burtynsky now boasts an international reputation, in part because of the universal nature of his photographs. Burtynsky was raised around the sites and images of the vast General Motors plant in Ontario, which inspired the development of his photographic depictions of global industrial landscapes. His thought-provoking imagery explores the relationship between industry and nature. His photographs of landscapes altered by human activity, such as quarries, mines and refineries, present us with contradictions. They visually represent threats to the health of our damaged planet and our reliance on natural resources to feed our 21st-century lifestyles.

Offering an overview of his artwork, Burtynsky states:

*Nature transformed through industry is a predominant theme in my work. I set course to intersect with a contemporary view of the great ages of man; from stone, to minerals, oil, transportation, silicon, and so on. To make these ideas visible I search for subjects that are rich in detail and scale yet open in their meaning. Recycling yards, mine tailings, quarries and refineries are all places that are outside of our normal experience, yet we partake of their output on a daily basis. These images are meant as metaphors to the dilemma of our modern existence; they search for a dialogue between attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear. We are drawn by desire—a chance at good living, yet we are consciously or unconsciously aware that the world is suffering for our success. Our dependence on nature to provide*

*the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction. For me, these images function as reflecting pools of our times.* (Burtynsky 2022)

In *Nickel Tailings #34*, the land and nature have clearly been transformed by industry. The vibrant red river that cuts through the centre of the photograph looks like lava flowing but it is actually nickel tailings, the waste product of mining activities. Simultaneously beautiful and horrifying, this industrial scenery is a salient observation of the devastation humans can and have wrought on the landscape. The combination of beauty and horror is often present in Burtynsky's artworks, representing a kind of industrial sublime.

The theory of sublime in art was put forward by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The sublime is an artistic effect that produces the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling. T.R. Rover writes,

*The sublime is understood as an aesthetic sensibility or quality evoked by an encounter with an object or phenomenon of such overwhelming power, grandeur, and immensity that it is almost beyond comprehension. The experience borders on the edge of outright terror, yet this is also combined at the same time with a sense of exhilaration and elation. Unlike other largely pleasurable or pleasing aesthetic qualities, such as the picturesque and the beautiful, there is always something intrinsically unsettling and disturbing about the sublime experience that nevertheless is also deeply alluring.* (Rover 2014, 125)

*Nickel Tailings #34* represents a kind of industrial sublime: a majestic scene that also provokes fear, terror, and powerlessness. Burtynsky's photographs lure us in with their crisp detail, the repetition of patterns, highly keyed colour, and grand scale. His use of a large-format camera allows him to achieve tremendous detail. The viewer is struck by the colour, composition, and aesthetic allure of the images, while their detail and realism are chilling precisely because these are landscapes we will likely never actually see. But they are also ambiguous and contradictory: "[M]any critics wonder whether Burtynsky in aestheticizing environmental destruction is, in fact, justifying it or providing an aesthetic alibi for it. After all, many a Burtynsky print graces the walls of a corporate headquarters" (Rover 2014, 128). In his early artist statements, Burtynsky often shied away from coming across as an environmentalist or claiming that his artworks were didactic. He often suggested that he was simply presenting images of the land, leaving interpretation up to the viewer. More recently, however, Burtynsky has become more outspoken about his views on the human effects on the land and earth; no doubt this change is a by-product of seeing first-hand the damage that humans have done to the planet.

There is often a calculated distance to Burtynsky's images; they assume a cold and distant authority, a depersonalisation. As with his larger body of work, *Nickel Tailings #34* reads like a documentary photograph. The viewer is not aware of the mediation of the photographer; we are simply presented with a scene, but of course every image is the byproduct of the artist, of the maker. Burtynsky has thought carefully about his subject matter, the framing and composition, the scale, and vantage point of this image.

As art critic R.M. Vaughan has inquired:

*Does Burtynsky's rightfully admired cinematic approach...his positioning of the camera far, far away from the action captured, serve to inform, by giving the viewer a fuller picture, or does it simply distance the viewer from the action, and thus, perhaps, the acceptance of complicity? In other words, by removing the viewer from the grit, often via an elevated viewpoint, does Burtynsky's work have an effect opposite to its apparent motivation? Instead of making us aware of how much we are part of the problem, stuff-crazed consumers that we are, does the work...in fact let us off the hook, by showing us, both figuratively and literally, that the problems are simply too big?* (Vaughan)

Burtynsky's work is neither celebration nor total denigration, and thus his photographs are deeply complex ruminations about the ruination of the planet. *Nickel Tailings #39*, unlike the modernist representations of industrial progress by Charles Comfort and Yvonne Housser, shows us the unsettling reality of a landscape scarred by our consumer desires and needs.

Explore Edward Burtynsky's artworks included in the online exhibition *Footing the Bill* by Art for Change here. Pick one of the "ACT" engagement activities on the website, and in 150-200 words describe whether or not Burtynsky's artwork prompted you to want to take action, and reflect on the environmental issue and activity that the ACT button asked you to do. Consider your own reaction to Edward Burtynsky's presentation of landscapes devastated by industry, global consumerism, and electronic waste. Do you find them captivating images? Would you have reacted differently if the images were more ruined and less visually seductive? How can we reconcile our desire for modern conveniences of mass-produced goods with our concern for environmental destruction? What can images do to help us understand the current debates that are circulating about the brand-new epoch we have brought about?

## The land remembers

Watch Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine speak about her sculptural practice, her relationship to land, and the ways that land carries histories with it.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=130#oembed-5>

This excerpt from Amber Hickey's essay "Rupturing settler time: visual culture and geographies of Indigenous futurity" discusses Bonnie Devine, ecological memory, and land:

*Bonnie Devine is an artist based in Toronto and the Founding Chair of the Indigenous Visual Culture program at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU). Devine explores othered temporalities through very different means—primarily sculpture. Devine is known for her incorporation of story and longstanding Anishinaabe materials and practices into her work, much of which explores the impact of uranium mining on her home, the Serpent River First Nation. The Serpent River First Nation is situated along the Canadian Shield, which comprises some of the oldest stones on Turtle Island. These stones, shaped over billions of years, are highly contested. They are sites both of Anishinaabe teachings and of mineral extraction (Devine, 2017). Devine grew up with an awareness of the tensions between these two qualities of the stones. When I asked her what the legacy of uranium mining at the Serpent River First Nation looks and feels like, she responded by sharing an experience from when she was five or six years old. I quote Devine at length here, as this experience continues to shape her artistic approach and interests today:*

*[W]e were driving along the Trans-Canada Highway, Highway 17, which cuts right through our territory and our reserve. And I remember seeing on the side of the highway a giant pile of yellow powder—a giant pile of yellow powder. And all around the pile of yellow powder, the ground had been*



burned black. The very rocks were burned this charcoal black, and it was a really beautiful image because the color of the pile of powder was electric yellow. I had never seen a color like that before. It was accentuated further by the fact that it was surrounded by this black background, it was like a triangle against this black background. It looked like a drawing. And I really do believe that it was seeing that drawing-like landscape that made me an artist. It made me begin immediately to attach meaning to image, and to seek meaning in images. And that was early on. I remember asking my grandfather who was driving his pickup truck what that was, and he wouldn't tell me. It became this mystery that I held close. And I remember they put me to bed that night and I'm lying there, and the silence up there is immense—we didn't live in the village of Serpent River, we lived along the river in a house that was isolated from everything else and surrounded by forest, hills, and just a little dirt road that you got to that house by. And I'm lying there in the dark in my little bed and I remember making a promise to myself that I would find out what that was, and that I would tell the story of that. And I did find out what it was, it was sulfuric acid, and that's why it was burning the land around the pile. The sulfuric acid was used in the refining process for the raw uranium ore.

This sulfuric acid wreaked havoc on the Serpent River First Nation. The water became unsafe, and the community is still on a boil-water advisory. The pow wow grounds are no longer useable as they are directly adjacent to the sulfuric acid plant. Dancers were unable to use their moccasins after three days of dancing—they were covered in holes burnt into the material by the sulfuric acid (pers. comm., October 5, 2017). Devine's mention of the devastating impact of sulfuric acid surprised me to an extent, because she had not yet mentioned the impact of the uranium tailings. This, I believe, is evidence of the breadth of challenges this extractive project continues to present to the Serpent River First Nation. Regulatory systems to ensure the safety of small communities are lacking across Turtle Island. The number of communities with unmarked uranium tailings ponds is astounding, until one reflects upon the capitalist, white-supremacist, colonial foundations on which all of these projects were put forward. This is clearly the intended outcome within this violent framework.

Letters from Home is a sculptural work created in 2008, part of a broader project called Writing Home. Letters from Home comprises four glass casts of stones within the Serpent River First Nation. As mentioned before, these stones are known for being some of the oldest in Turtle Island. Amid the controversy in the Serpent River First Nation regarding the legacy of uranium mining, Devine wondered what these stones, these elders, would say of the matter. Could she find a way to make the arguments of the stones visible and legible? Devine decided to take casts of the stones, and consider them as texts or messages. In this act, Devine also framed the stones as elders, questioning Western notions of agency and expertise....

Devine qualified Letters from Home, noting that though it may seem metaphorical, it should be taken seriously:

When I speak of the land as containing a narrative, it's not really an abstraction. It really is this idea that in fact the land remembers. And where our faulty human memory fails, the rocks actually contain a record. And of course it's imaginative and it might strike some people as fanciful. But for me it's deadly serious (pers. comm., October 5, 2017). (Hickey 2019, 172-77)

Engage with works from Bonnie Devine's *Writing Home* in an exhibition at Connexion Artist Run Center in New Brunswick. Be sure to click the link to view the PDF exhibition catalogue. <https://connexionarc.org/2008/01/25/writing-home/>

Listen to “Where is the Land in Landscape?” Episode 12 of art historian Linda Steer’s podcast *Unboxing the Canon* (25 min, 39 sec). Steer’s podcast reflects many of the tensions between beauty and power in landscape that we have encountered in this module. It also situates differences between Eurocentric and Indigenous understandings of the land. For example, Steer discusses the idea that European landscapes can be seen as invitational, in which the viewer can enter the work and are an extension of colonial processes. This idea contrasts with some Indigenous-made landscapes that can be seen as anti-invitational in the ways that they deploy strategies to block a viewer’s entry into the work and to resist colonial processes. Bonnie Devine’s work resists colonial processes in her understanding of the land as holding memories of human and environmental stories—for example, the way the land scars from climate events. The land remembers and the land listens. Steer ends the podcast thinking about Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore’s artwork *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991), a large wooden megaphone used to speak to the earth. Steer imagines what she would say if she could walk up to the megaphone and speak through it, addressing the earth. Write down what you would say if you had the chance to stand in front of *Speaking to Their Mother*.

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Elizabeth Cavaliere on William Notman, *Ice Shove, Commissioner Street, Montreal* (1884)
- Mark Cheetham on Noel Harding, *Elevated Wetlands* (1997-1998)
- Isabelle Gapp on Franklin Carmichael, *Grace Lake* (1931)
- Hana Nikčević on Rebecca Belmore, *Biinjya'iing Onji (From Inside)* (2017)
- John O'Brian on Robert Del Tredici, *Stanrock Tailings Wall, Elliot Lake, Ontario* (1985)

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Vaughan, R.M. 2011. "Is the Brilliant, Troubling Burtynsky Too Easy to Admire?" *The Globe and Mail*, April 6, 2011.

## Additional resources

"Landscape and Ecology 1980-Present" series of essays on Smarthistory.

Rose, Gillian. 1993. "Looking at Landscape: The Uneasy Pleasures of Power." In *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, 86-112. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

# PORTRAITURE

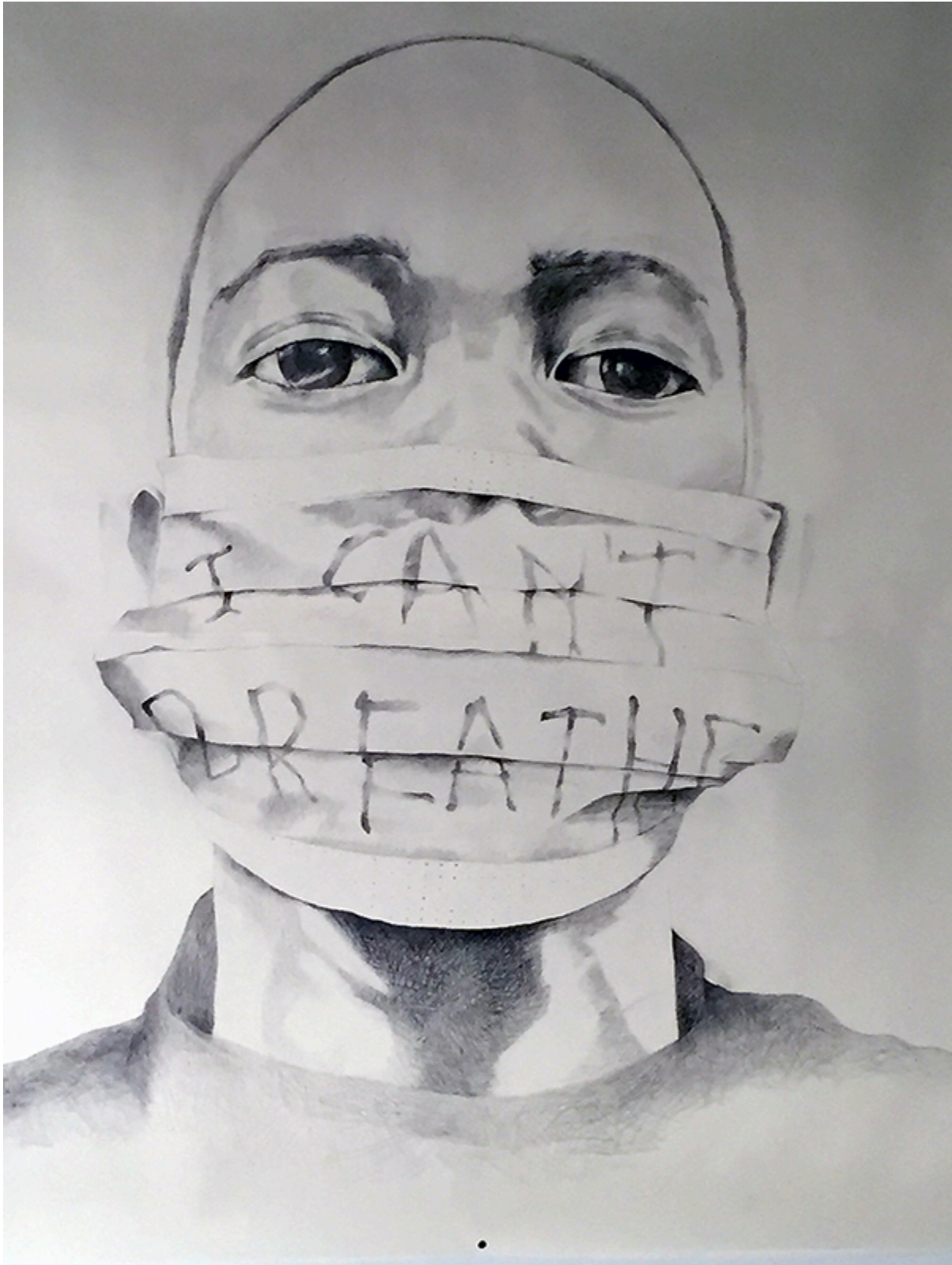


Figure 5.1 Syrus Marcus Ware, *Their Borders Crossed Us: For Eric*, 2015. Graphite on paper, 243.8 x 304.8 cm.

"I can't breathe." After months of wearing masks to protect ourselves and others amid the coronavirus pandemic, the image of a protester with their face partially covered might seem unremarkable. However, here "I can't breathe" does not refer to a resistance to mask mandates; rather, these are the last words of Eric Garner, a Black New Yorker killed by police in 2014 after they placed him in an illegal chokehold while attempting to arrest him. The killing of Garner led to widespread protests across the United States, including a December 20th protest at the Mall of America where Taui Green, the activist depicted here, demanded justice for Garner.

*Their Borders Crossed Us: For Eric* comes from Toronto-based artist and community activist Syrus Marcus Ware's *Activist Portrait Series*, a collection of works that capture—on a larger-than-life scale—the faces and figures of those working to effect change for their communities. Ware's series focuses on activists from marginalized communities, and includes depictions of trans, queer, and disability-rights activists, as well as founding members of Black Lives Matter—Toronto. In creating portraits on a massive scale, Ware tackles an artistic tradition that has typically been used in the West to glorify royalty, military leaders, celebrities, and politicians. Ware instead uses it to celebrate the grassroots work of individuals who often go unacknowledged in the press, and whose names are rarely known among those who benefit from their work. In doing so, Ware highlights the commitment and potentially outsized influence of these individuals, their work contributing to building a better, more just world. As he states,

*By using the methods and modes of painting and portraiture, community—specifically Black, Indigenous, Queer and Trans, the disability community—is documented as a lived reality and painted into art history. Lives are rendered visible through this large format and use of a style and medium previously reserved for dignitaries and wealthy patrons. The artistic tradition of painting is impacted by re-enforcing systemic structures such as class hierarchies, racism, and defining which humans are valuable. This body of work attempts to interrupt this process by re-entering the frame around "unintelligible bodies"—those on the margins (Ware 2021).*

Ware's activist series thus engages with the history of portraiture in Western art in a manner that both upends it and reinforces its value.

Watch the video below to learn more about Ware's process for making the works in his *Activist Portrait Series*.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-1>

Portraits are works of art that contain a representation of an individual. They can be carved or painted, rendered through photography or collage; they can be abstract or realistic, and may serve as official documents or touchstones for precious memories. Today in Canada (as elsewhere), we are surrounded by portraits; they fill our phones and our wallets, clutter our news feeds and social media, remind us of who we are, and also who we might be. However, the ubiquitous nature of the portrait in Canadian society is a relatively recent phenomenon given the history of the genre. While portraiture has been central to many artistic traditions across cultures and centuries, in the West it has often been used to connote money and power, and to identify those who possess it.

In this context, portraits were typically commissioned by wealthy individuals as a means to convey their status, occupation, or position in society. As a result, many historical portraits feature representations of the aristocracy and successful merchants, as well as celebrities such as writers and performers. They are less likely to depict the working classes, enslaved people, or those without claim to notability through either status or occupation. In recent years, contemporary artists have challenged the absence of these communities and populations in portraiture by deliberately inserting neglected or unrepresented groups into their work. A

now well-known example of this is the African-American artist, Kehinde Wiley, who appropriates imagery from historical portraits of notable figures and replaces these figures with ordinary Black individuals, selected through a process Wiley describes as “street casting.” In altering these historical works, Wiley draws attention to the absence of Black people in Western portraiture. Like Ware, he both affirms and critiques the power of the portrait. Other artists working in the Canadian context have also created works in this vein. The historical portraits created by Zacharie Vincent and the contemporary photography of Jeff Thomas both focus on the representation of Indigenous individuals, again drawing attention to the omissions and elisions in the history of portraiture.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 5.1

Take a moment to note the portraits you have seen today. Whom do they depict? Where are they? Consider whether these portraits were produced for particular purposes or placed in significant locations. How do you think they are intended to be viewed? What power dynamics are evident when you think about these portraits in this way?

### By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- consider the “double presence” of portraits and how both artist and sitter might be agents in a work’s creation
- recognize portraits not as straightforward likenesses of individuals, but as objects caught within systems of signification
- critically analyze portraits, including by “reading against the grain”
- articulate how portraiture engages with issues of representation—who is represented and how.

### It should take you:

***Their Borders Crossed Us*** Text 10 min, Video 3 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**From absence to presence** Text 30 min, Video 4 min

**Seeing as self-determination** Text 20 min, Video 5 min

**Affirming existence** Text 17 min, Video 19 min, Audio 4 min

**Learning journals** 6 x 20 min = 240 min

**Total: approximately 6 hours**

### Key works:

- Fig. 5.1 Syrus Marcus Ware, *Their Borders Crossed Us: For Eric* (2015)
- Fig. 5.2 François Malépart de Beaucourt, *Portrait of a Haitian Woman* (1786)

- Fig. 5.3 François Fleischbein, *Portrait of Betsy* (c. 1837)
- Fig. 5.4 “Advertisement,” *Quebec Gazette*, January 29, 1778
- Fig. 5.5 John Rock, “Advertisement,” *Nova-Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, September 1, 1772
- Fig. 5.6 Prudence Heward, *Hester* (1937)
- Fig. 5.7 Image of Dorothy Stevens's *Coloured Nude* (1932)
- Fig. 5.8 Prudence Heward, *At the Theatre* (1928)
- Fig. 5.9 Zacharie Vincent, *Self-portrait*, n.d. (before 1878)
- Fig. 5.10 Wampum belt (Eastern Woodlands) (18th or 19th century)
- Fig. 5.11 Annular brooch (Eastern Woodlands) (18th or 19th century)
- Fig. 5.12 Ceinture fléchée perlée (Huron-Wendat) (1825-75)
- Fig. 5.13 Cornelius Krieghoff, *Moccasins Seller Crossing the St. Lawrence at Quebec City* (c. 1853-63)
- Fig. 5.14 Judith Leyster, *Self-portrait* (c. 1630)
- Fig. 5.15 Jeff Thomas, *The Bear Portraits: Cultural Revolution* (1984)
- Fig. 5.16 Madame Gagné, *Mrs. Wing Sing and Son, Montreal, QC* (1890-95)
- Fig. 5.17 C.D. Hoy, Group of men in front of C.D. Hoy's store in Quesnel, British Columbia (c. 1910)
- Fig. 5.18 Chinese immigration certificate (1913)

## From absence to presence

Typically, when art historians think about the identities of individuals associated with works of art, they focus on the artist. However, in the study of portraiture, the focus is somewhat different. In this case, researchers focus on the individual depicted in addition to the artist; sometimes the sitter is even seen as more important than the artist who executed the portrait. This is what art historian Lara Perry calls a portrait's “doubled presence.” She writes, “Any portrait is a documentation of at least two historical events: the presence of the sitter, and the work of the artist. A portrait, consequently, has two agents, and a doubled presence. While both agents (sitter and artist) might be held mutually responsible for the finished object, more commonly one agent is privileged as the producer of the image” (Perry 2001, 117).

For Perry, this is a useful way of thinking about portraiture because it allows us to consider the creative contributions of those depicted, and how they might have sought to control their own image. Women, for example, often modelled for portraits, but were less frequently the authors of them, and thus they had fewer opportunities to determine the works' final aesthetics and the translations of their likenesses. Although focusing on the individual depicted rather than the artist does not address the absence of some communities from historical portraiture, it does offer art historians an opportunity to consider and recognize the aesthetic contributions of those depicted, and whose role in the creation of the artwork has rarely been privileged.

This module explores these themes through a consideration of portraiture in the Canadian context, focusing not only on who is depicted, but how. It further investigates the significance of these choices, and how something as seemingly ordinary and conventional as a portrait can not only challenge artistic conventions, but also how we understand ourselves and Canadian society.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 5.2





*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-5>*

Watch “What is the difference between a selfie and a self-portrait?” Then, choose a recent photo that you consider to be a good representation of yourself (this image doesn’t need to contain a person) and write a short paragraph (4-5 sentences) describing why you think this is the case. Make sure to draw upon specific visual details in your answer. Would you categorize this image as a self-portrait or a selfie? Why?



Figure 5.2 François Malépart de Beaucourt, *Portrait of a Haitian Woman*, 1786. Oil on canvas laid on canvas, 69.1 x 55.6 cm. M12067, McCord Museum, Montreal. Public domain. Uploaded by Wikimedia user InverseHypercube.

This portrait by French-Canadian artist François Malépart de Beaucourt was previously titled *Portrait of a Negro Slave* or *Portrait of a Negress*; it was likely created while Beaucourt was living in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, the region currently known as Haiti. Although enslaved individuals do appear in several group portraits in the European tradition, often as indications of a family's wealth and status, portraits of individual enslaved people are unusual. As Marcia Pointon notes, because portraits are predicated on the existence of an autonomous individual and slavery, by its very nature, transformed people into objects and property, a portrait of an enslaved person is almost a contradiction. As she asks, "if the slave officially has no identity, how can he or she be configured in a genre, the languages of which were coined to bespeak individuality?" (Pointon 2013, 62).

Recent research by art historian Charmaine Nelson suggests that the sitter is most likely fifteen-year-old Marie-Thérèse Zémire, one of several enslaved women and girls owned by Beaucourt's wife, Benoite, during her lifetime, and who was removed from Saint-Domingue to Montreal by Beaucourt and his wife as they fled the tensions that would eventually lead to the Haitian Revolution (Nelson 2015). While settlers in Canada did not rely on slavery to the same extent as their American counterparts, slavery was a relatively common source of domestic labour in aristocratic, professional, and merchant households until the 1834 implementation of the law abolishing slavery across the British Empire. In the mid-18th century, for instance, there were approximately 3,600 enslaved people living in New France (Quebec). These included Indigenous individuals as well as those of African descent, who, like Zémire, were brought to Canada via the Caribbean.

Because Zémire likely sat for this portrait at the behest of her owner, it is difficult to read the image in the same way we might read portraits commissioned by their sitters and which typically serve as a projection of how the sitter perceived their own identity. Indeed, Beaucourt's image, and the manner in which he depicts Zémire, contains similarities to other examples of visual culture from the period. A 1791 engraving by Nicolas Ponce which features illustrations of both an enslaved and a free woman of colour in Saint-Domingue, for instance, distinguishes between the free woman of colour, or *affranchie*, and the enslaved woman (*ésclave*) through their dress. The *ésclave* is only semi-clothed—her breasts are bare—and she wears a plaid headwrap and carries a basket of fruit (Wilson 2021). Nelson has pointed out that the proximity between Zémire's bare breast and the basket of fruit, often a symbol of fecundity in Western art, in Beaucourt's painting may allude to the woman's potential for "breeding," a detail that would highlight her value as property; female slaves were prized for their ability to produce more slaves given that slavery was a hereditary institution (Nelson 2014). Children born to enslaved mothers, whether the product of a relationship between enslaved individuals or coercion by white slave owners, were themselves forced into slavery.

If Beaucourt's image depicts Zémire as he, a white colonial slaveholder perceived her, is it possible to read any elements of this portrait as indications of this woman's autonomy, of her identity as anything other than an enslaved individual? Charmaine Nelson's attempt to name the sitter of Beaucourt's painting offers a first step in locating this woman in history, to give her an identity, which would have been forgotten at the moment of this portrait's creation as the work's previous title—*Portrait of a Negro Slave*—suggests.

Considering the material culture within the work offers us another way to read the image. In Beaucourt's work, Zémire is depicted wearing a red and white *tignon*, or headwrap, probably made of madras or similar cotton cloth. Headwraps were a common form of attire for women throughout the Caribbean, Louisiana, and the Spanish Gulf Coast in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and from at least 1779 were a mandatory article of clothing for all women of colour in Saint-Domingue, whether free or enslaved. (A similar law was enacted by Governor Esteban Miró in Spanish Louisiana in 1786.) These **sumptuary laws**, enacted by white, colonial governments in societies with large Black populations worked to police Black women's bodies—Black women were regarded as sexually lascivious in comparison to their white counterparts—and maintain racial distinctions, as slavery and interracial relationships led to an increasingly creolised society. However, recent scholarship has sought to define the headwrap as more than a marker of Black women's subordination within colonial societies. Instead, scholars such as Jonathan Michael Square and Nicole Wilson see it as a potential site of resistance.



Headwraps like the one worn by Zémire in Beaucourt's portrait have their roots in West African cultures and formed a link between enslaved women in the Caribbean and their ancestors, despite the violent attempts of slave traders and owners to erase these connections. However, more than a link to their heritage, headwraps became a site of Black women's creativity. Styled, knotted, wrapped, and adorned in a variety of ways, headwraps became a means for women to signal their social status, cultural heritage, or ingenuity while working within frameworks imposed by colonial governments. As Wilson writes, "By reassembling West African headwrapping traditions in the New World, women of colour were able to reassert their corporeal autonomy and demonstrate countercultural defiance in the face of a colonial infrastructure that sought to obliterate ancestral African cultural identities" (Wilson 2021, 5).

While we do not know whether Zémire was responsible for styling the headwrap in Beaucourt's painting or whether it was an addition prompted by the artist's engagement with visual tropes for the depiction of enslaved Caribbean women, its presence subtly alludes to a history of self-styling and a bid for autonomy in a society that otherwise stripped individuals of their identities in order to redefine them as property. Thus, much like the way Afro-Creole women used headwrapping to subvert the colonial legislation that governed their bodies and lives, the headwrap within Beaucourt's portrait challenges the artist's attempt to reframe Zémire as an object without a history rather than an autonomous subject.




Figure 5.3 François Fleischbein, *Portrait of Betsy*, c. 1837. The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans. Public Domain. Uploaded by Wikimedia user The Historic New Orleans Collection.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 5.3

Consider the two advertisements below.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T S.



**R**ANAWAY from the Printing-Office in Quebec, on Sunday night the twenty-fifth instant, a Negro Lad named JOE, born in Africa, about twenty years of age, about five feet and an half high, full round fac'd, a little marked with the small-pox, speaks English and French tolerably; he had on when he went away a new green fur-cap, a blue suit of cloaths, a pair of grey worsted stockings and Canadian macassins. All persons are hereby forewarned from harbouring or aiding him to escape, as they may depend on being prosecuted to the utmost rigour of the Law, and whoever will give information where he is harboured, or bring him back, shall have **EIGHT DOLLARS** Reward from  
**THE PRINTER.**

Figure 5.4 "Advertisement," Quebec Gazette, January 29, 1778. Public domain.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T S.

**R**AN away from her Master JOHN ROCK, on Monday the 18th Day of August last; a Negroe Girl named *Tuesday*, about four and an half feet high, broad sett, with a Lump above her Right Eye: Had on when she run away a red Cloth Petticoat, a red Baize Bed Gown, and a red Ribbon about her Head. Whosoever may harbour said Negroe Girl, or encourage her to stay away from her said Master, may depend on being prosecuted according as the Law shall direct. And whosoever may be so kind to take her up and send her home to her said Master, shall be paid all Costs and Charges, together with **TWO DOLLARS** Reward for their Trouble.

**JOHN ROCK.**

HALIFAX, Sept. 11, 1772.

Figure 5.5 John Rock, "Advertisement," Nova-Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle, September 1, 1772. Public domain.

What visual and material details can you glean from these texts? How do these details compare to what is typically represented in portraits during this period? Why do you think the descriptions are so detailed? Why might reading alternative sources against the grain be significant for the study of art history in Canada?

Portraits of specific enslaved individuals from the 18th and 19th centuries are rare. As a result, scholars have looked to other media for alternative visual depictions of enslaved people. Charmaine Nelson, for instance, has proposed that reading runaway slave advertisements "against the grain" allows them to

function as a kind of visual representation. When reading against the grain, researchers attempt to move beyond the dominant reading of a text—or the most commonly accepted interpretation—to discover alternative, even resistant readings. In the North American context, this often means looking at the work from a less privileged perspective—in a way that disrupts an assumed white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, or able-bodied point of view. Because those who lack privilege—whether by virtue of their gender, race, or class—have frequently been overlooked or left out of dominant narratives, reading against the grain presents a means to address the gaps—and sometimes fill the silences—in Canadian history.



Figure 5.6 Prudence Heward, *Hester* (1937) Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 89.2. Agnes Etherington Art Centre.

Prudence Heward's modernist painting *Hester* offers a very different depiction of a Black woman. As with Beaucourt's image of Zémire, this work plays with the conventions of portraiture. Most critically, it merges the portrait—the sitter is a named individual—with another Western artistic tradition, that of the nude, a genre that

emphasizes the depiction of the unclothed human form, often within the natural landscape. At the same time, the work does not easily conform to either tradition.

*Hester* is stripped of many of the features used to identify individuals in conventional portraits; although her facial features are distinct, she wears no dress or accessories that might point to an occupation, social status, nor her temporal or geographic location. (Unlike Beaucourt's model, however, Hester's head is uncovered, revealing her natural Black hair.) Heward also avoids portraying Hester in the alluring manner typical of the female nude in Western art history. Although the woman's figure does appear in a natural landscape, the pose is somewhat awkward—the model is slumped and her breasts sag. She might even be described as modest—Hester's hands are delicately placed to cover her genitals. Given that the female nude was typically created for consumption by a heterosexual male audience, these differences are significant.

Prudence Heward specialized in studies of the human figure, despite the general popularity of landscape painting in Canada during the early 20th century. Many of her works focus on female subjects and this is not the only image she created that depicts a Black woman. Others include *Dark Girl* (1935), *Negress with Sunflowers* (1936), and *Girl in the Window* (1941). Like Beaucourt, Heward presumably hired or persuaded the model to sit for this image—rather than painting it at the sitter's request—and it is possible that Heward completed this work, or a study for it, while visiting her artist-friend Isabel McLaughlin in Bermuda. Nevertheless, the sitter is named in the title of the work, which is not the case for Heward's other images of Black women, suggesting a desire for an identity and image to cohere—something we do not observe in Beaucourt's painting.

Some scholars have questioned Heward's interest in Black, female subjects. Art historian Julia Skelly, for instance, suggests that it is unclear “[w]hether this interest was primarily formal (in that painting Black women allowed her to experiment with different colours of paint), altruistic (calling attention to issues of race in Canadian society), a result of the availability of black models in early twentieth-century Montreal (many of whom worked as domestics and needed the additional money), or a combination of these factors” (Skelly 2015, 41). Certainly, Heward was invested in the avant-garde artistic movements popular in Europe in the early 20th century. In the 1920s, she studied art in London and Paris, absorbing and reinterpreting the visual language of the Fauves and Post-Impressionists, and, while working in Montreal, studied and associated with other artists influenced by European modernism, especially those concerned with the human figure, including William Brymner and Edwin Holgate (Skelly 2015, 5-8). Heward's exploration of the Black female form in works such as *Hester* may have been another means of investigating the possibilities of representing the figure in art. However, as Skelly points out, Heward's work also raises questions about the intersections of gender, race, and class in 20th-century Canadian society. More broadly, it prompts a consideration of how a subject's race might shape their portrayal in art.

Within Western art history, the nude has traditionally been regarded as an opportunity for artists to showcase the female form for the pleasure of a presumably male, heterosexual audience. In doing so, artists employed certain conventions: the female nude was depicted in nature, emphasizing women's perceived affinity with the natural—as opposed to the rational—world; her gaze was typically lowered, allowing the male spectator to consume her image without scrutiny; and she was frequently portrayed in allegorical guise (perhaps most famously, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, offers a nude in the guise of Venus, the Roman goddess of love) (Parker and Pollock 2013, 115-16). Such disguises further permitted audiences to innocently view the work, to consume a fantasy, rather than the baldly naked form of a woman. However, as Charmaine Nelson has pointed out, these conventions operate somewhat differently when the subject depicted is not a white woman (Nelson 1995).



THE EXHIBITION OF  
THE ROYAL CANADIAN ACADEMY

As the three major Canadian firms are a reflection of Canada's social and economic structure, the formal education in Toronto is also a reflection of the country's social and economic structure. Through the national merit system as represented by university entrance examinations, the Canadian education system, by its nature, represents a meritocracy. The meritocratic system is based on the merit and the achievement. It is an exclusion of ethnic background and social class. The meritocratic system is the representation of Canadian society from the perspective of the Dominions here as well as, perhaps, as many self-sufficient nations of Belgium and Switzerland. One of the factors between politicians and the public, the meritocratic system of university entrance examinations is based on the merit and the achievement. It is an exclusion of ethnic background and social class. The meritocratic system is the representation of Canadian society from the perspective of the Dominions here as well as, perhaps, as many self-sufficient nations of Belgium and Switzerland.

many praised Heward's Black nudes, the negative and often racist responses from critics reveal that the artworks also clearly challenged viewers (Smither 2019, 90).

Why did Heward “trouble” herself with this depiction? Certainly, as a white woman artist from an established Montreal family, Heward would have occupied a very different social position to that of her model and it is possible that she saw working-class Black women as a ready source of artist models, as Skelly suggests. At the same time, as a female artist, Heward was also subject to limitations. She never married, as married women were often encouraged to abandon professional careers. In moving between artistic conventions Heward’s work defies a straightforward reading of the Black body objectified by the white, colonial gaze. Given a name, yet painted unclothed, *Hester* is both subject and object, a reminder of the progress made by women in Canadian society in the 20th century, as well as of the limits imposed upon those identified racially as “other.” As art historian Devon Smither writes, “Operating outside the artistic and ideological conventions that governed the representation of black women at the time, *Hester* offers contradictory visual elements that challenge the stereotypical representations of black women at this time” (2019, 87).

Heward's *Hester* exists between these conventions. She passively averts her gaze and does not directly address the spectator, yet her posture is closed; she covers her pubic hair and her body slumps in on itself. Similarly, sitting between portrait and nude, *Hester* is not disguised by fantasy; she is flesh and blood, distinguished by the colour of her skin. And, unlike Stevens's *Coloured Nude*, she exists in harmony with the natural landscape—her body merges with the tree against which she sits—though it could be argued that the lush foliage in the background sets *Hester* apart from the Canadian context. These details draw our attention to the complex intersections of race, gender, and class, and how these factors shaped the experiences of the artist, model, and viewer. Some, for instance, reacted negatively to the work's refusal to conform to artistic convention. As one reviewer/critic wrote in 1938, "Heward's 'Hester' was far from pleasing. Why, oh why, take the trouble to paint—and paint well—a hideous, fat, naked negress, with thighs like a prize-fighter and a loose-lipped, learing [sic] face?" (R.B.F. 1938). While





Figure 5.8 Prudence Heward, *At the Theatre*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 101.6 cm. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA). Uploaded by Wikimedia user Guerinf.

Consider Heward's *Hester* in relation to *At the Theatre*. How are women depicted in each of these images? Where are they and what are they doing? Who do you think was the intended audience for each of these works? What do these images suggest about women's status within Canada at the beginning of the 20th century?

## Seeing as self-determination



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#h5p-7>

Figure 5.9 Zacharie Vincent, *Self-portrait*, n.d., before 1878. Oil on paper, 62.5 x 53 cm. Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City. Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA). Uploaded by Wikimedia user Wilfredor.

Although the paintings by Beaucourt and Heward contain the traces of portraiture’s “doubled presence,” it is likely that in both cases the depiction of the subject was largely, if not exclusively, determined by the artist. In Huron-Wendat artist Zacharie Vincent’s *Self-portrait* (n. d.) from the 19th century we see something different. As both creator and subject of this work, Vincent was able to determine and enact the manner of his own self-presentation. In doing so, he not only offers a powerful image of self-determination during a period of intense settlement, but the painting also reflects the complex changes occurring within Indigenous societies as a result of European colonization.

Some of these changes are reflected through the objects that adorn Vincent’s body—regalia drawn from Huron-Wendat and colonial traditions and hybrid objects which signify the meeting of these cultures—and which further mark his status as a Huron-Wendat chief. Hover over the image above to learn about the different objects in this portrait and their significance.

These objects demonstrate the adaptation of European materials—silver, glass, and iron—and insignia by the Huron-Wendat in a manner that reflects their 19th-century context, while their placement in Vincent’s self-portrait suggests a perception of Huron-Wendat chiefs like himself as the equal of and diplomatic counterpart to the British and French officials with whom they interacted.

While Vincent’s self-portrait depicts numerous objects of Indigenous artistry, it does so in a manner very different from other depictions of the period. Consider, for instance, Dutch-Canadian painter Cornelius Kreighoff’s image *Moccasin Seller Crossing the St. Lawrence at Quebec City* (c. 1853-63), which, as its title suggests, depicts an Indigenous woman trudging across the frozen river, perhaps hoping to sell her wares in the bustling urban centre. The bundle of moccasins affixed to her body is indicative of their role as a commodity. The Huron-Wendat relocated from the Great Lakes to Quebec at the end of the 17th century as Indigenous communities were stripped of their traditional territories, whether by treaty or by force, and earlier patterns of subsistence were disrupted. For some, artisan production, especially the production of souvenir wares, became a means for supplementing hunting and other forms of trade. Indeed, moccasins were particularly popular among 19th-century consumers, and became a fashionable form of slipper (Gaudet 2019).



Figure 5.13 Cornelius Krieghoff, *Moccasin Seller Crossing the St. Lawrence at Quebec City, c. 1853-1863*. Oil on canvas, 27.2 x 22.3 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Public domain. Uploaded by Wikimedia user Heffel Fine Art Auctions, Toronto.

Krieghoff's painting offers a generic image of productive artistry, yet it also isolates the woman within the landscape, with only a suggestion of settlement seen in the distance, perched on the ridge behind her. In doing so, Krieghoff simultaneously configures the artisan as a member of a vanishing population, a common, if inaccurate, perception settler populations held of Indigenous populations—one which simultaneously helped to generate enthusiasm for the souvenir trade, as settlers and collectors sought to purchase Indigenous-made objects in an attempt to preserve the authentic work of a supposedly “dying” culture.

As one of the first Indigenous artists to work within the Western tradition of easel painting and to appropriate the practice of using engravings and photographs as reference images, Vincent's use of portraiture demonstrates his fluency in Indigenous and Western visual cultures and pictorial languages—through both his choice of medium and the content. Artists' self-portraits, which typically depict the artist at work or with the tools of their trade, have historically been used in the West as a bid for recognition and self-promotion. They demonstrate the artist's skill, both through the image depicted and through their very existence.

For instance, in the Dutch artist Judith Leyster's self-portrait, we see Leyster at her easel, paints and brushes in hand. On the easel is a depiction of a fiddler, indicating Leyster's ability to produce portraits as well as other popular genre pictures of her day. At the same time, however, Leyster herself is depicted, not in her painting attire, but in fashionable dress with delicate lace cuffs and a starched collar, alluding to the nobility of her task. In portraying herself in this manner, Leyster not only advertises her abilities, but makes a bid to be taken seriously, to be recognized as a serious, professional artist.

For more on self-portraiture, watch the video below. Can you think of other ways artists might represent themselves?



Figure 5.14 Judith Leyster, *Self-portrait*, 1630. Oil on canvas, 74.6 x 65.1 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Public Domain. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-2>

Vincent's self-portrait, then, can also be seen to participate in this tradition. As well as his oil paintings, Vincent also created jewellery and other artisanal crafts, and the objects displayed within his self-portrait work not only allude to his talent with a brush but to his abilities with leather, metal, and wood. However, as art historian Louise Vigneault suggests, Vincent's work, through the plethora of objects displayed, can be read as a celebration of the rich artistic traditions of the Wendat and simultaneously through the use of self-portraiture



as a genre. The painting thus communicates Vincent's desire to be regarded as an artist in the Western sense of the word. She writes, "The self-portrait legitimates his social standing and differentiates him from the anonymous traditional artisan, allowing him to be recognized as an artist whose work is defined not only by technical skill but also by intellectual struggle. Despite the respected place of the artisan in Huron culture, Vincent surely sought to exchange his anonymous status—as a maker of snowshoes and jewellery—for that of a professional artist, and to mark his production as distinct from the Native arts that, although anchored in tradition, remained narrow, specialized, and at the mercy of market forces" (Vigneault 2014, 41). Like the hybrid objects depicted within Vincent's work, his self-portrait shows him operating between worlds, adapting and borrowing from both in order to forge his identity as both an artist and a Huron-Wendat chief in the 19th century.



43.64943, -79.39321

Figure 5.15 Jeff Thomas, *The Bear Portraits: Cultural Revolution*, 1984. Photograph. Courtesy Jeff Thomas.

If settler-artists such as Kreighoff reinforced romantic depictions of the “dying Indian” which Vincent’s self-portrait directly challenge, then self-described Urban-Iroquois artist Jeff Thomas’s photographic portraits examine a more recent manifestation of this myth: the absence of representations of Indigenous peoples from Canada’s urban centres.

*Cultural Revolution* is the first in a photographic series known as *The Bear Portraits* which features Thomas’s son, Bear, in various urban or culturally significant locations. Taken on Toronto’s Queen Street in 1984 when

Bear was seven years old, the image juxtaposes the youthful frame of Thomas's young son with an aging brick wall adorned with rough graffiti, raising the spectre of a gritty city. Through Bear and the baseball cap he wears, the photograph also contrasts contemporary portraits of Indigenous individuals with historical ones; Bear's hat features a depiction of the Cheyenne leader Two Moons, an image derived from a photograph taken by American photographer Edward S. Curtis, who is best known for an expansive series of portraits of Native Americans taken in the early 20th century.

Curtis has been criticized for intentionally romanticizing his depictions of Indigenous people, playing into stereotypes of Indigenous North Americans as stuck in the past or as members of dying civilizations in a manner that also overlooked the role of European settlers in the destruction of Indigenous lives and traditions. Curtis's images often avoid depictions of Indigenous peoples who adapted to the cultural and social shifts wrought by colonisation. In other instances, Curtis intentionally manipulated his photographs to frame Indigenous people in a past he believed was more "real" or "authentic" than contemporary life. For example, in *In a Piegan Lodge* (c.1910), Curtis or one of his assistants retouched the image to remove any indication of modern artifacts like the presence of the clock in the original image. By alluding to Curtis's work through the placement of the hat, Thomas turns this work on its head and instead reasserts the presence of Indigenous peoples in the North American landscape through the presence of his son (who also represents the youthful next generation) despite the use of government policy and the expansionist construction of civic architecture to erase Indigenous people and landscapes. Where Curtis's photographs relied on stereotypes of the "noble savage" and the "dying Indian," Thomas's images disrupt more contemporary settler stereotypes of Indigenous people—that they all live on reserves separate from modern or urban life. Further, as a series, even a somewhat spontaneous and sporadic one, Thomas's images assert the consistency and longevity of the Iroquois presence in urban Canada. As Thomas writes of his own reaction to the work, "When I saw the print, I saw myself as a young boy and remembered the fractured relationship I had with my father. This series explores the loss of male role models by using Bear as a marker of Indian-ness in sites where it does not exist. The first Bear Portrait set in motion a new way of looking at the city and, like the graffiti, my revolution was against the invisible urban Iroquois presence" (Thomas 2021).

Watch the video below to learn more about Jeff Thomas's artistic practice. How does it challenge settler-colonial narratives of Indigenous erasure?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-3>

Through his photography, Thomas does the looking, documenting not only urban Iroquois existence, but what the urban landscape looks like through the eyes of an Indigenous person. This use of the camera provides another powerful contrast with Curtis's work. In *The Bear Portraits*, Thomas and his son become the subjects of the work, rather than the object of the photographer's gaze, as was the case for the Indigenous sitters in Curtis's images. This reversal is significant as it draws upon the camera as a tool for self-determination. Cultural critic Susan Sontag has argued about photography that, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power" (Sontag 1973, 4). In photographing his son, Thomas takes ownership of the image, and of the portrayal of urban-Iroquois individuals like himself, thus reclaiming the power of the image.

At the time of their creation, Zacharie Vincent's and Jeff Thomas's portraits challenged settler assumptions about the presence of Indigenous people in North America and they continue to do so today. Other artists have used and continue to use portraiture to picture an Indigenous future. Read artist Lauren Crazybull's essay "Seeing Through" to learn more.

## Affirming existence

Thomas's works combine formal portraiture with the tourist snapshot, alluding to the camera's role in the democratization of portraiture. Developed in 1839, photography quickly grew in popularity as a visual form. By the late 19th century, people had found new ways to use the medium for scientific pursuits, artistic inspiration, and exploration, as well as commercial enterprises. Requiring specialized knowledge and equipment to produce, yet increasingly affordable, photography proliferated in this period through the photographic studio. People were eager to have their portrait taken, something which was previously available only to those wealthy enough to afford paintings. In many ways, the photographic studio made portraiture accessible and, much like painted portraits before them, allowed people to present themselves as they wished to be seen, rather than exactly how they were. The social desires and aspirations of sitters conveyed through portraits were matched by the entrepreneurial spirit of the photographers themselves, who advertised their services as novel interpretations of the photographic medium or as catering to a specific clientele. Notable photographic studios in Canada during this time include those of William Notman in Montreal, William Topley in Ottawa, and Hannah Maynard in Victoria.

In Montreal, a woman known only as Madame Gagné was an active member of the photographic community (she was also married to photographer Édouard Gagné), specializing in photo cabinet cards and portraits of Montreal's Chinese community, possibly because of her studio's proximity to Montreal's emerging Chinatown, situated within the Ville-Marie borough.



Figure 5.16 Madame Gagné, Mrs. Wing Sing and Son, Montreal, QC, 1890-95. Silver salts on paper mounted on card, albumen process, 17 x 12 cm. MP-1984.44.1.2, McCord Museum, Montreal. Public domain.

Asian immigration to Canada began in the 1850s, with individuals—the majority of whom were men—fleeing

social and political upheaval at home, or seeking work in a new land. The 1885 *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* lists the occupations of Chinese labourers in British Columbia: many worked as domestic or farm labourers, as merchants, in the clothing trades (boot makers, washermen, sewing machine operators), as miners, or as fish-hands in British Columbia's canneries (Royal Commission 1885, 363-66). Perhaps most notably, many Cantonese immigrants found employment in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, where they were regarded as an inexpensive source of labour; they were paid a fraction of the wages offered to their European-Canadian counterparts.



Figure 5.17 C.D. Hoy, *Group of men in front of C.D. Hoy's store in Quesnel, British Columbia, c. 1910*. Photograph. Barkerville Historic Town Archives, Barkerville. Public domain.

The variety of labour undertaken by these immigrants is reflected in photographer Chow Dong (C.D.) Hoy's image of a group of men in front of his studio-general store in Quesnel, British Columbia. As curator Faith Moosang writes, "Hoy's photographs are important documents of the nascent industries of ranching, farming, and mining in Quesnel, fields in which the men depicted in this group portrait would have worked" (Moosang 2021). Hoy, himself an immigrant from China, also created images that register the diversity of the community in and around Quesnel. Established as an outfitting post for those setting out for gold in the 19th century, Quesnel became a hub for white European and American settlers, Chinese immigrants, and residents of the Kluskis, Nazko, Ulkatcho, and Quesnel First Nations, many of whom came before Hoy's lens during the decade in which he operated his studio. Moosang regards this as one of the most remarkable elements of the some 1,500 images taken by Hoy: "When so much of what was happening at that time was about cultural marginalization and even erasure, the idea that these very people showed up at Hoy's studio to celebrate their own existence is a powerful statement" (Moosang 2021).



Listen to this short “Shout Out to C.D. Hoy” episode on The Secret Life of Canada podcast to learn more about Hoy and his photographic practice.

Initially, many Asian immigrants settled on the West Coast of Canada and about ten percent of British Columbia's population was of Asian descent by the early 20th century. However, the newly constructed railway also facilitated movement across the vast expanse of Canada, and Chinese communities—Chinatowns—grew up in many urban centres, including Montreal. These close-knit communities fostered small businesses, including restaurants, import businesses, and laundries, and offered a supportive network to those who often faced racism and discrimination in their new home.

The Canadian government and white settler Canadians' growing animosity towards Chinese immigrants is most markedly illustrated by the imposition of the “head tax,” first implemented in 1885. This law required new arrivals from China to pay an immigration fee, which was \$50 in 1885 and increased to \$500 by 1903. The head tax was meant to stem the flow of Chinese immigration, but was also premised on the belief that Chinese immigrants were not settlers. Despite their participation in constructing communities and business, not to mention the railway, government officials were doubtful that Chinese immigrants would remain in the country and contribute to Canada's long-term growth.

Mme. Gagné's portrait of Mrs. Wing Sing and her son is thus unusual in two respects. Because immigration to Canada was incredibly expensive for Chinese citizens, the majority of individuals who ventured to cross the Pacific were men who would have had greater opportunity to gain employment upon their arrival. Women, such as Mrs. Wing Sing, made up a disproportionately small portion of immigrants from China. Gagné's portrait of Wing Sing and her son also speaks to the variety of immigrant experiences. The majority of Chinese immigrants living in Canada in the 19th century were offered low-paying work which would have made it challenging for them to afford the luxury of a family portrait—even a photographic one. Nevertheless, Mme. Gagné seems to have found a steady supply of customers in Montreal's Chinatown, highlighting the importance some may have placed on documenting their presence in their new home.

To explore these issues further, watch “How does the construction of race influence self-portraiture?” from Britain's National Portrait Gallery. How does this discussion relate to the Canadian works we have looked at?



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-4>*

Mrs. Wing Sing's clothing, which features a long jacket (*ao*) with wide sleeves, and thick-soled shoes, is consistent with that expected of the dutiful wife in late Qing-dynasty China. The sheen of the textiles used to adorn Mrs. Wing Sing and her son are most likely silk rather than cotton or wool. However, the jackets worn by the pair are fairly simple and do not feature brocade patterns or embroidery. These elements signal the status of the Wing Sings; however, their clothing also allows us to speculate about the intended audience for this photograph. While it was not unusual for women in 19th-century colonial societies to participate in and maintain pre-colonial practices of dress, even as men adapted to or adopted items from the colonial culture—as is evident in C.D. Hoy's photograph—it is also possible that Mrs. Wing Sing and her son donned their Qing-dynasty attire specifically for this photograph, just as many students wear their best outfit for picture day, and that their everyday dress was quite different. Like the postcard images taken by Hoy, it may be that this picture

was taken to be sent to relatives in China, to demonstrate the success of the family in Canada as well as how they were keeping with the “old ways” even as they settled into their new surroundings.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 5.5



Figure 5.18 Government of Canada, Chinese immigration certificate (Lee Shing Dok), 1913. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Public Domain. This reproduction is a copy of the version available on the web.

Consider the image of Mrs. Wing Sing and her son, as well as that of the men in front of C.D. Hoy's store in relation to this image from a Chinese immigration certificate. What kind of portraits are these? If, as Susan Sontag suggests, photography implies an act of appropriation, how do these photographs articulate individual identity, and for what purpose?

Today, portraits are everywhere in Canadian society. They are so common that in many ways they seem ordinary, even mundane. However, the extraordinary popularity of the selfie should remind us that the allure of capturing

one's image remains potent, particularly if that image is aspirational, alluding to the most influential or creative version of ourselves.

Not all of the works considered here are self-portraits; however, in each instance, it is possible to view the sitter—and not simply the artist—as an agent in the work's creation, whether through the subtle styling of their attire or their willingness to turn camera and brush upon themselves. Some of these works contain mere traces of a sitter's individual identity; others firmly proclaim the sitter's existence, often in defiance of stereotypes and policies that sought to erase or minimize their presence—both in visual culture and Canadian society.

Historically, not everyone had the opportunity to sit for a portrait and the names of many who did are lost to us today, but just as Syrus Marcus Ware's activist series reminds us of those working diligently to transform society, portraits remind us of who we were at a particular moment—perhaps caught between worlds or maybe on our way to making ourselves anew.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 5.6



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=132#oembed-6>

Watch author Tracy Chevalier's TED Talk, "Finding the Story Inside the Painting," and then choose one of the portraits featured in the OER or on the Art Canada Institute website and write a micro-fiction (max. 500 words) about the individual depicted in the work. Your story should be creative but should also be rooted in the material and visual properties you observe in the image itself. Try starting this exercise with a session of close looking, making note of the details that interest or intrigue you. This is not a research assignment, but you may draw upon the information you find in the OER or on the ACI website.

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Efrat El-Hanany on Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial* (2011)

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# BELONGING



Figure 6.1 Arthur Goss, *Slum Exterior*, early 1900s. Photograph. City of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

From the 1840s to the 1950s, St. John's Ward was home to many of Toronto's immigrant communities. Immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada from dispersed regions of the world settled in the blocks between Yonge, University, Queen, and College Streets, which came to be known as "the Ward." Black Americans escaping slavery along the Underground Railroad, Irish people fleeing the potato famine, Jews evading persecution in Eastern Europe, and Toronto's growing Chinese community were among the diverse groups who established roots and lives and built businesses and community services in the densely packed neighbourhood. As journalist John Lorinc writes in his history of the neighbourhood, the Ward "had a distinctive character that set it apart from the surrounding city. . . . [a]s far back as the 1850s, here was a complex and recognizably urban neighbourhood already characterized by ethnocultural diversity, crushing poverty and upward mobility" (Lorinc 2015, 13).

As the official photographer for the City of Toronto from 1911 to 1940, William Arthur Scott Goss produced thousands of photographs of all parts of the city, including St. John's Ward. Goss was assigned the task of documenting the Ward by Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Hastings, who wanted to raise awareness about the public health crisis in the area caused by overcrowding and the city's lack of sanitization standards, safe water, and a proper sewage system. Photographs like *Slum Exterior* depict everyday life in the neighbourhood. Like most of Goss's pictures of the Ward, this photo captures squalor, hardship, and suffering in the area, but it also offers a glimpse of the self-determined communities that formed there. Exhibited in venues across Toronto, Goss's photographs played an important role in making the living conditions in the Ward a priority at City Hall; however, they also fuelled xenophobic ideas about the area and marginalized the racially and ethnically diverse communities that lived there in a majority white, politically conservative city.

As art historian Sarah Bassnett writes in *Picturing Toronto: Photography and the Making of a Modern City*, Goss's photographs:

*Did not merely illustrate the effects of power. Rather, they created the sites where social subjects were produced and power was negotiated. In two photographs intended to show the problems of overcrowding and the 'need for a municipal lodging house,' the poor immigrant men who lived in these*

*congested lodging are the object of a surveillance that constitutes them as problematic social subjects, defined by their difference in class and nationality. . .With these instrumental photographs, social problems and social subjects were identified and produced, and the new knowledge they provided made possible new forms of social regulation. (Bassnett 2016, 94)*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.1

In the article “A little girl in Toronto lost to history – and now found,” reporter Chris Bateman tracks down the identity of the once-anonymous subject of one of Goss’s most famous photographs of the Ward by searching for clues in the photograph itself and in the City of Toronto archives.

Read Bateman’s article and then look closely at *Slum Exterior*. What evidence in the photo might help you learn more about its subjects? What signs of community and belonging do you see?

Goss’s photographs are among the only surviving documents of life in the Ward. By the 1960s, many inhabitants had been pushed out of the neighbourhood, and buildings were expropriated and razed to create space for new developments, including landmarks such as Nathan Phillips Square, City Hall, and the Eaton Centre. In 2015 and early 2016, a small area of the Ward was excavated to prepare for the construction of the New Toronto Courthouse on Armoury Street. Over the course of several months, archaeologists uncovered hundreds of thousands of artifacts among the ruins of row houses, factories, a 19th-century Black church, and a synagogue established by Russian Jews—all vestiges of the communities that made their homes in the Ward.

Watch the video, “Unearthing Toronto’s Multicultural Past” by Infrastructure Ontario, below. During the early stages of the new Toronto Courthouse project, archaeologists discovered thousands of artifacts dating back to when the site was part of St. John’s Ward.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=134#oembed-1>

Today, Greater Toronto is celebrated as one of the most diverse cities in the world. St. John’s Ward is a significant part of the history that made it this way. The remnants of the neighbourhood that were unearthed in 2015, even more than Goss’s photographs, are evidence of the ways in which its inhabitants may have fostered community, and a sense of belonging, through religious, social, and cultural centres. Yet the story of the Ward is also a story of marginalization, exclusion, and competing understandings of community and belonging. These themes recur in different ways in the artworks we will look at in this module.

### By the end of this module you will be able to:

- describe and analyze different definitions and experiences of belonging in Canada
- explain how settler-colonialism, migration, and multiculturalism have shaped different communities’ relationships to Canada



- discuss debates about the definitions and limits of multiculturalism in Canada
- use visual and textual analysis to show how experiences and definitions of belonging (and unbelonging) can be expressed through images and text.

## It should take you:

**The Story of St. John's Ward** Text 8 min, Video 3 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**A Place to Belong?** Text 15 min, Video 4 min

**Inclusions/exclusions** Text 30 min, Video 4 min

**Multiculturalism debates** Text 30 min, Video 77 min

**Communities** Text 15 min, Video 84 min, Audio 30 min

**Learning journals** 11 x 20 min = 220 min

**Total: approximately 8 hours**

## Key works:

- Fig. 6.1 Arthur Goss, *Slum Exterior* (early 1900s)
- Fig. 6.2 Deanna Bowen, *1911 Anti Creek-Negro (Muscogee) Petition* (2013)
- Fig. 6.3 Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *Treaty Card* (2004)
- Fig. 6.4 Shelley Niro, *500 Year Itch* from *This Land is Mime Land* (1992)
- Fig. 6.5 Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991)
- Fig. 6.6 Ken Lum, *There's No Place Like Home* (2000)
- Fig. 6.7 Vera Frenkel, *...from the Transit Bar* (1992)
- Fig. 6.8 Camille Turner, *Miss Canadiana, Hometown Queen Series* (2011)
- Cornelia Wyngaarden and Andrea Fatona, *Hogan's Alley* (1994)
- Stan Douglas, *Circa 1948* (2014). Interactive digital installation. National Film Board of Canada.
- Fig. 6.9 Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street* (2001)
- Fig. 6.10 Karen Tam, *Tchang Tchou Karaoke Lounge* (2008-2010)

## A place to belong?

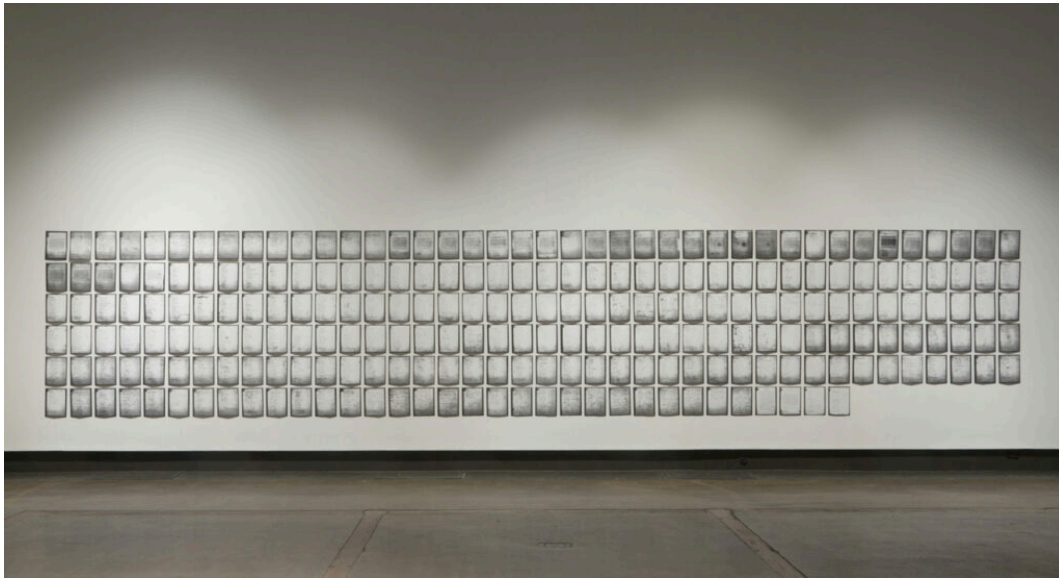


Figure 6.2 Deanna Bowen, *911 Anti Creek-Negro Petition*, 2013. Inkjet print on archival paper, 21.59 × 27.94 cm. Collection of Deanna Bowen.

In 1911, around the same time that white social reformers in Toronto began to call upon the city to contain or demolish racially diverse St. John's Ward, over 4,000 Albertans signed a petition to stop Black Americans from immigrating to the province from the Southern United States. Deanna Bowen's *1911 Anti Creek-Negro Petition* (2013) presents photocopies of the 8×11 pages of this petition, including hundreds of pages of signatures, in a grid that occupies nearly an entire gallery wall. Bowen uses strategies from conceptual art to emphasize information contained in this archival document, such as the language of the petition letter, the names of individual signatories, and the sheer number of those named.

For Bowen, this list of names is also a sort of map that can be used to trace the influence of anti-Black racism through Canadian culture and society. She writes,

*The petition reveals an expansive network of white Albertans that included Barker Fairley, who at that time taught at the University of Alberta. Fairley's signature on the petition is a critical part of this puzzle: he was an ardent advocate for the Group of Seven and their unpeopled landscapes. In the Fall 1948 issue of Canadian Art, he wrote that "we now have a body of landscape painting—Group of Seven and post Group of Seven which warms the hearts of thousands of Canadians and gives them the right sort of national pride." In both instances, seemingly mundane historical documents (or the lack thereof) speak volumes about the values of a community of like-minded people rallying together to stop the influx of Black Muscogee (Creek) peoples, who were, according to the petition, "deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada." Following Fairley to the University of Toronto, where he taught from 1915 onward, leads to the inner circles of Massey's Hart House and the Arts and Letters Club. The violent sentiments in the petition about who constitutes a desirable Canadian strengthen in time to become a mutually regarded white Imperialist vision among Fairley and his friends (Bowen and Wilson-Sanchez 2020).*

Barker Fairley's signature links the group of Albertans who signed the 1911 petition to the art and culture around Massey College at the University of Toronto in a single network. Ties between histories and sectors that we often think of as discrete or disconnected are exposed through Bowen's work. The wide reach of the anti-Black racism embodied by the petition was reinforced later that same year when the cabinet of Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier drafted Order-in-Council P.C. 1324, which proposed banning all Black immigration to Canada

for a period of one year because Black people were seen as unsuitable for the climate and the order being the culmination of a campaign of diplomatic racism. While the Order was repealed and never became law, the statements it made about national identity and race were very clear. The 1911 petition and Order-in-Council P.C. 1324 are examples of white settlers' organized efforts to define Canadian identity in a way that excluded Black people. The Edmonton petition of 1911 denounced Black immigration as "alarming" and a "serious menace to the future welfare" of the province, and the federal government agreed, hiring agents to discourage immigrants from attempting to cross the United States border (Wittmeier 2020).

## LEARNING JOURNAL 6.2

Carefully read the text of the 1911 Anti Creek-Negro (Muscogee) cover letter and petition addressed to Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier. What does this text reveal about the authors' and signatories' ideas about belonging in Canada?

To the Right Honorable Sir Wilfred Laurier, G.C.M.G., Premier of Canada,  
OTTAWA, Ont. Sir,-

We, the undersigned residents of the city of Edmonton, respectfully urge upon your attention and upon that of the Government of which you are the head, the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of Western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of negro settlers.

This influx commenced about four years ago in a very small way, only four or five families coming in the first season, followed by thirty or forty families the next year. Last year several hundred negroes arrived at Edmonton and settled in surrounding territory. Already this season nearly three hundred have arrived; and the statement is made, both to these arrivals and by press dispatches, that these are but the advance guard of hosts to follow. We submit that the advent of such negroes as are now here was most unfortunate for the country, and that further arrivals in large numbers would be disastrous. We cannot admit as any factor the argument that these people may be good farmers or good citizens. It is a matter of common knowledge that it has been proved in the United States that negroes and whites cannot live in proximity without the occurrence of revolting lawlessness, and the development of bitter race hatred, and that the most serious question facing the United States to-day is the negro problem. We are anxious that such a problem should not be introduced into this fair land at present enjoying a reputation for freedom from such lawlessness as have developed in all sections in the United States where there is any considerable negro element. There is not reason to believe that we have here a higher order of civilization, or that the introduction of a negro problem here would have different results.

We therefore respectfully urge that such steps immediately be taken by the Government of Canada as will prevent any further immigration of negroes into Western Canada.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Dated at Edmonton, Alberta, this 18th day of April, 1911.

## NEGRO IMMIGRATION

We view with alarm the continuous and rapid influx of Negro settlers into Northern Alberta and believe that their coming will bring about serious social and political conditions.

This immigration will have the immediate effect of discouraging white settlement in the vicinity of the Negro farms and will depreciate the value of all holdings within such areas.

We fear that the welcome extended to those now coming will induce a very large black population to follow them.

The problems likely to arise with the establishment of these people in our thinly populated province must be plain to all and the experience of the United States should warn us to take action before the situation becomes complicated and before the inevitable racial antipathies shall have sprung up.

We do not wish that the fair fame of Western Canada should be sullied with the shadow of Lynch Law but we have no guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population.

We would therefore urge upon the Government the need for immediate action and the taking of all possible steps to stop Negro immigration into Alberta.

Deanna Bowen's family immigrated to Alberta from the Southern United States in the early 1900s after the implementation of Jim Crow legislation legalized racial segregation and anti-Black discrimination. Her art often draws on her family history and archival research to explore past and present racism in Canada, connecting her personal relationships and communities to the social and governmental forces that regulate who does and does not officially get to belong in this country.

Watch Bowen discuss how her artwork reflects on Blackness and anti-Black racism in Canada through her family's history and archival research.

[https://vimeo.com/229131205?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=364932](https://vimeo.com/229131205?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=364932)

### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.3

Without using a dictionary or other sources, define “belonging” and “community.” What do these terms mean to you? How do you experience belonging and community in your life? What roles do country and national identity play in your understanding of these terms? Did learning about the Ward and the *1911 Anti Creek-Negro (Muscogee) Petition* challenge, change, or expand your understanding of these terms?

## Inclusions/exclusions

Questions of belonging in Canada are inextricable from the history and ongoing realities of settler-colonialism. Beginning with the first treaties between the British Crown and Indigenous nations in the early 1600s, the

colonial government has implemented numerous policies and laws that have determined the conditions and criteria for belonging on this land and in this nation, including the 1867 Indian Act. The Indian Act gave the federal government the authority to determine “Indian Status,” or who is and is not considered Indigenous under the law. It also gave them the power to manage reserve lands and to implement a wide-ranging program of eliminating Indigenous cultures and forcing assimilation to settler society, including by criminalizing certain Indigenous cultural practices and expanding the residential school system.

In 1951, the Act to Amend the Indian Act implemented several important changes to the Indian Act by removing some of the most oppressive cultural and religious prohibitions. However, it also tightened restrictions on who is legally considered Indigenous through the introduction of the Indian Register, a centralized list of all “status Indians” in Canada. To qualify as “Indian” under Canadian law, individuals were now required to provide proof of paternal relation to someone who was a band member when a treaty was signed, someone who was a “status Indian” in 1876 when the first Act was passed, or someone who was included on a band membership list. Accepted evidence for proving relations and claiming “status” was limited to legal documents issued by the colonial state, such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, death certificates, and divorce papers. The requirement to prove one’s belonging through paternal lineage made it especially difficult for women to keep and pass on status to their children, particularly if they married a non-status person. Individuals who qualify for “Indian Status” are required to carry a Certificate of Indian Status (now an Indian Status Card), or Treaty Card, to access the resources or benefits to which they are entitled under the amended Indian Act.

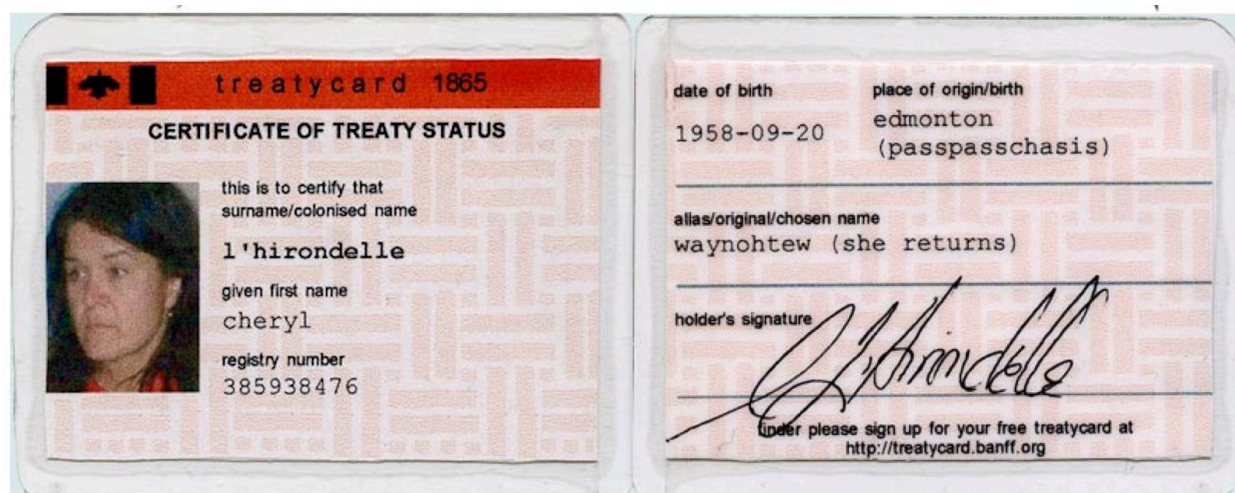


Figure 6.3 Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Treaty Card, 2004. Collection of Cheryl L'Hirondelle.

Multi-disciplinary Cree/Métis artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle's 2002 internet artwork, *TreatyCard.ca*, interrogates the colonial logic and function of the Indian Register. By inviting the audience to participate in a mock-bureaucratic process of applying for “Indian Status” through a website, she raises questions about the criteria for determining who is and is not considered a “status Indian” under Canadian Law, and about the authority of the Register to regulate Indigenous people’s legal relationships both to their communities and to the settler-colonial state.

*TreatyCard.ca*'s sparsely designed splash page features a reproduction of the handshake Treaty Medal, which was first produced in 1873 and given as a gift to Indigenous Chiefs who signed certain treaties. While the medal was meant to symbolize the agreement and the commitment between the Crown and Indigenous bands, the engraving, which shows a representative of the Crown (likely the Prince of Wales) shaking hands with a reductive stereotype of an Indigenous chief tells, a different story. Below the medal, a text written by L'Hirondelle introduces the project:

*this site is an attempt to re-dress current relations between natives & non-natives by re-examining the intent, issue and details of the canadian government's 'certificate of indian status' which is more commonly known as 'treaty card' in mainly the plains on the landbase now called canada.*

*when the treaties were signed it was between a chief on behalf of the people and a representative of the queen on behalf of her people. since the treaties were made between at least two parties, then both should have a card. today 'treaty indians' are the only holders of the card which is commonly known to be a carry-over from the reserve pass system whereby indian people living on reserves were not allowed to leave (to hunt & gather, visit relatives or carry out business) unless the indian agent who controlled food rations would issue this pass. perhaps this is why the card is a canadian government issue and doesn't acknowledge the original treaty agreement as much as it still attempts to control the identity & movement of the card holder by branding all "...is an indian within the meaning of the indian act, chapter 27, statutes of canada..." and has efficiently trained card holders to present as a regular part of daily interaction (and sadly even used to boast as some elevated form of government certification) (L'Hirondelle 2002).*

By clicking the medal on the website's homepage, visitors are taken to a form that they can complete to obtain their own imitation "Treaty Card." L'Hirondelle's registration system departs from the federal government's system in several important ways. In addition to requiring documents issued by the colonial state as proof of identity and genealogy, the Indian Register accepts information in only English or French, which means that family names and birthplaces must be translated from Indigenous languages. L'Hirondelle's form accepts information in Indigenous languages and includes spaces both for "colonized" names and for "alias/original/chosen" names, a detail that is particularly relevant to survivors of residential schools who would have been issued government documents with new westernized names that were assigned to them by the system. L'Hirondelle also expands the eligibility criteria for a card by writing instructions for three groups of users: 1) current holders of Indian Status, who want to revise the way their identity is defined and described in the Indian Register and on their card; 2) Métis and Inuit people who do not qualify for status under the terms of the amended Indian Act; and 3) non-Indigenous people.

The performative and playful openness of *TreatyCard.ca* can help us think through why and how Indigenous identity has been regulated by the settler government, and how this might impact individual's and communities' sense of belonging within Canada and the lands this country occupies.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.4

Visit [www.treatycard.ca](http://www.treatycard.ca) and complete L'Hirondelle's mock treaty card registration form. What information would you include to represent yourself? Why? Do you think this is an accurate representation of you? Is there anything about yourself that you think is important but were not able to include on the form?

#### VIEW SHELLEY NIRO'S 500 YEAR ITCH HERE

*Figure 6.4 Shelley Niro, 500 Year Itch from This Land is Mime Land (1992). Hand-coloured gelatin silver print, sepia toned gelatin silver print, gelatin silver print, and hand-drilled mat. Art Gallery of Ontario.*

The title of Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) artist Shelley Niro's series, *This Land is Mime Land* (1992), is a play on the lyrics to U.S. folk-singer Woody Guthrie's famous protest song "This Land is Your Land," a rallying cry for wealth and land redistribution, equality, and inclusion in the depression era United States. The aurally subtle



but conceptually significant shift from “this land is *my* land” to “this land is *mime* land” is a hint. Mime is a form of acting or theatre that does not use language, but relies on costumes, expression, and gesture to convey meaning. The photos in this series may look playful and innocuous, but they are carefully staged confrontations between settler-colonial stereotypes and self-determined expressions of Indigenous identity.

The series is comprised of twelve photographic **trptychs** on hand-drilled mats. Each triptych includes photographs titled *Historical*, *Personal*, and *Contemporary*. In the *Historical* photographs on the left, Niro dresses up as recognizable figures or archetypes from Western culture, including Marilyn Monroe, Santa Claus, Elvis Presley, and a judge. The *Personal* photographs in the centre of the triptychs are sepia-toned snapshots from Niro’s family’s archive. The third photograph in the group, *Contemporary*, is a self-portrait of Niro dressed plainly in her everyday clothes. The patterns drilled into the mats surrounding the photos reference the patterns of Kanien’kehá:ka beadwork.

This series was produced in 1992—the same year as the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s invasion of the Americas—in the aftermath of the 1990 Kanesatake Resistance (also known as the Mohawk Resistance or Oka Crisis). Both events, which sparked heated debates about Indigenous-settler relations in Canada, are referenced in Niro’s photographs. In addition to riffing on Woody Guthrie’s alternative national anthem, the title of this piece references the title of one of the first books on the Kanesatake Resistance, Craig MacLaine and Michael S. Baxendale’s *This Land is Our Land: The Mohawk Revolt at Oka* (1991). Many of these references appear in the *Personal* photographs in the middle of the triptychs. In the triptych subtitled *Judge Me Not*, for instance, Niro’s sister stands in front of Parliament Hill in Ottawa holding a sign that reads “Our land, our government, our future, our heritage.” In the background, demonstrators carry “Kanesatake Mohawk Nation” and “Peaceful Resolution” posters. The subtitle of another triptych, *Mohawk Worker*, recalls the name of the Mohawk Warriors, a guerilla group involved in the Kanesatake Resistance.

In the *Historical* photo of the triptych subtitled *500 Year Itch*, Niro gives an intentionally feeble impression of the famous skirt-blowing scene in Marilyn Monroe’s 1955 film, *The Seven Year Itch*. The subtitle’s play on words, the *500 Year Itch*, suggests that the “itch” here is the effect of five centuries of colonial violence and the disenfranchisement of Indigenous people (Harlan 1995, 122). Beside the photo of Niro dressed as Monroe is a *Personal* photograph of her mother, in nice clothes and styled hair, standing in a fenced yard and smiling happily and peacefully at the camera. When asked about the *Personal* photos, Niro explains that they are “an indicator of our view of the world” (Art Gallery of Ontario 2021). They prompt the viewer to reassess the photos of Niro dressed in costume or in her everyday clothes on either side.

Watch the following 2017 lecture by Shelley Niro at the Ryerson Image Centre.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=134#oembed-2>

## LEARNING JOURNAL 6.5

Choose three photos or images that represent historical, personal, and contemporary aspects of your identity. Why did you choose these photos? What do you think they might reveal about you, your life, and history to someone who doesn’t know you?

## Multiculturalism debates

Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been an important aspect of Canada's official national identity and the primary rhetoric used by the federal government to address cultural diversity and belonging in the country. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's Liberal government, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. The multiculturalism policy provided a framework for the government's response to the growing immigrant populations after World War Two, the effects of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, and struggles for racial equity led by BIPOC communities since the 1960s. When Prime Minister Trudeau introduced the policy to the House of Commons in April 1971, he emphasized its relationship to the Official Languages Act of 1969, stating, "Although there are two official languages [English and French], there is no official culture." While celebrated in Canada and abroad, Canada's multiculturalism policy has been marked by internal contradictions from its very beginning. As Trudeau's statement reveals, it simultaneously sought to embrace differences and to assimilate Indigenous people and new Canadians to one, or both, of the official language communities.

In 1988, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, turning the policy that was initiated in 1971 into a law. The Act was lauded for recognizing that "cultural diversity is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society." However, it has also been intensely debated. Indigenous and Canadian Studies scholar Eva Mackey has critiqued the limited definitions of "cultural diversity" and "multiculturalism" within the Act, arguing that they construct "the idea of a core English-Canadian culture, and that other cultures become 'multicultural' in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture" (Mackey 2002, 15). In other words, "multiculturalism" was enshrined in the law as an umbrella term for any person, community, or cultural expression that was not English and not white. According to Mackey, multiculturalism "has as much to do with the construction of identity from those Canadians who do not conceive of themselves as 'multicultural' as for those who do" (16). Within the terms defined by the Act, "the power and choice to accept difference, to tolerate it or not, still lies in the hands of the tolerators," i.e., the white English majority (29).

In their analysis of multiculturalism, art historians J. Keri Cronin and Kirsty Robertson note that "any notion of Canadian identity" is:

*Constructed atop a history of disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and cultural genocide—primarily of Aboriginal peoples but also of a litany of others who didn't fit a given period's definition of what it meant to be Canadian. . . .Multiculturalism is often used in Canada as a tool of control. It is often described as if settler nationality is a fait accompli, needing only a myth of unity into which newcomers can assimilate with ease. As often as not, events and actions that rub against the grain of this forceful idea are dismissed in a sort of syllogistic logic of belonging: Canada is not racist, and therefore racist actions that occur in Canada are, by definition, anomalous rather than systemic. This has been a powerful politics over the years and one against which numerous artists, writers, politicians, lawyers, and others have strongly reacted. (Cronin and Robertson 2011, 142-145)*

To learn more about multiculturalism debates in Canada, watch the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) video, "Multiculturalism in Canada Debated" (Sept. 4, 2004).

### VIEW JIN-ME YOON'S *SOUVENIRS OF THE SELF* HERE

*Figure 6.5 Jin-me Yoon, Souvenirs of the Self (Postcard Series) (1991). Simon Fraser University Art Gallery*

In the series *Souvenirs of the Self* (Postcard Series) (1991), Korean-Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon photographed herself at iconic sites in Banff, Alberta, a popular tourist destination in the Rocky Mountains and Canada's oldest



national park. Yoon wears the same clothing—a Nordic-style sweater and jeans—and adopts a similar stance in each photo, one foot slightly in front of the other with her arms at her sides. She looks directly and neutrally at the camera as she poses in front of various scenes including Lake Louise, a vista featuring the Banff Springs Hotel, in downtown Banff, beside a vitrine in the Banff Park Museum, beside a plaque commemorating Chinese railroad workers, and with a group of white tourists and their East Asian driver in front of a chartered bus. At first glance, the photos might resemble conventional, slightly bored, tourist shots. By printing and distributing them as postcards, however, Yoon sets up an interplay between official and personal souvenirs, between the postcards sold at tourist bureaus and the type of photos individuals might take with their cameras or phones.

The ambiguous status of these photographs provokes questions about their subject: Is she an official representative of the quintessentially “Canadian” landscape she occupies? A visitor? What is her relationship to these sites and the national narratives they represent? What assumptions about race, nationality, and belonging do we, as viewers, bring to the images?

Each photo is accompanied by an ironic two-line caption describing the location it depicts, and the thoughts and actions of its female subject. The captions for the photos in which Yoon stands in front of Lake Louise and the Banff Springs Hotel, for example, “celebrate” the colonial history of Canada by inviting the viewer to “Feast your eyes on the picturesque beauty of this lake named to honour Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, daughter of Queen Victoria” and “Indulge in the European grandeur of days gone by.” As Hyun Yi Kang has written, such exultant statements “can be effected only through a willful erasure of both the native populations displaced by the European settlers in the figuration of ‘the Canadian wilderness’ as well as the non-European immigrants and their contributions to the establishment and growth of Canada. The unabashed nostalgia for the ‘days gone by’ is riddled with a certain antipathy for the continued ethnic and cultural diversification of Canada through immigration” (1998, 33).

Banff National Park is located on the traditional territory of the Kootenay, Stoney, Blood, Peigan, Siksika and Tsuu T’ina First Nations peoples. The federal government designated the land a National Park in 1885 in part to attract tourists to the region and to increase passenger traffic on the newly constructed western leg of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had been built by thousands of temporary Chinese workers in extremely dangerous and deadly conditions. The pristine “Canadian” wilderness that images of Banff have long represented in national narratives is the product of settler-colonialism and immigrant labour. Yoon’s postcards unravel the tourist industry’s picture of Canada, prompting the viewer to ask themselves who belongs in this landscape, and to whom this landscape belongs.

Hyun Yi Kang explains the connection between the histories embedded in Yoon’s postcards and multiculturalism:

*On [the back of] each postcard panel, three vertically arranged captions, written in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean proclaiming, “We too are the keepers of this land,” attest to the differential processes of racialization and the incongruous connections of ethnic specificity and racial categorizations. While this tri-lingual declaration can serve as an empowering slogan that seeks to claim a space of entitlement for Asians in both the literal and figurative Canadian national landscape, it also simultaneously indicates an ongoing struggle for political and cultural recognition. In that vein, I read these vertical captions and their adjoining placement on “A 100% Canadian Product” as figuring the coalitional identity of “Asian Canadian” as a product of Canada’s own specific history of anti-Asian racism. . . . On this note, the tri-lingual caption challenges the bi-lingual [English and French] debates, which proffer only two possible choices for the official language of a much proclaimed “multicultural” Canada. The connections among geography, language and community are never organic but forcefully dictated, and as such, they demand careful calibration (34-35).*

The viewer is a key element in making meaning of the work which relies on pre-existing stereotypes for the artwork’s legibility. It makes racism visible, and offers an examination of the idea of home and belonging; it asks questions about who gets to be seen as a citizen and how these ideas are always measured against a

mainstream or centre that is not racialized (i.e., white) despite government and societal efforts to tout diversity and multiculturalism.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.6

Take a photo of yourself at a site that represents the city, town, or neighbourhood where you currently live. Why did you choose this site? How does it represent the place you live? What is your relationship to this site and place?

#### VIEW KEN LUM'S *THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME* HERE

*Figure 6.6 Ken Lum, There's No Place Like Home (2000). Six inkjet prints. National Gallery of Canada.*

Like Yoon, Vancouver-based artist Ken Lum uses photography and text to pose questions about identity, race, and belonging within the context of Canadian multiculturalism. Originally commissioned for a museum in Vienna, Austria, his billboard-sized work, *There is No Place Like Home* (2000), took on new meanings when it was displayed on the side of the Canadian Museum of Photography in Canada's national capital, Ottawa, in 2002. The format and design of *There is No Place Like Home* borrow from the language of advertising, but strategically defies advertising's clarity. These formal characteristics and the work's location in the national capital might have led some viewers to "mistake the billboard for an official Canadian government advertisement extolling the virtues of Canadian multiculturalism through a cautionary tale of racial strife" (Foo 2005, 40).

*There is No Place Like Home* is a grid of photographs of six people of different races, ages, and genders interspersed with texts in English and French expressing different feelings about their unspecified "homes." The placement of the texts above and between the photos undermines efforts to definitively attribute each sentiment to a specific individual; however, in the context of Canada's capital, the pairings also facilitate stereotypical associations among race, nationality, and belonging. For example, the text above an angry-looking white man reads "Go back to where you come from! Why don't you go home?" The text above a brown woman wearing a head covering states "I'm never made to feel at home here. I don't feel at home here." By strategically leaving the work open to interpretation and asking the viewer to conceptually connect each photograph to a text, Lum encourages us to reflect on the assumptions that we are bringing to them. Why would we connect the feelings expressed in one text to a particular person and not another?

Cynthia Foo explains *There Is No Place Like Home* within the context of Canadian multiculturalism:

*Rather than a possible 'united in diversity' reading of multiculturalism (and therefore an idealized notion of Canadian citizenship), There Is No Place Like Home instead erodes a static sense of 'home,' sense of the 'nation,' and thus also a clear sense of which individuals are seen as 'citizens.' . . . Lum's There's No Place Like Home thus answers as it questions: there is no (such) place as 'home,' if this home or nation is to be reliant on a homogenous understanding of belonging (this approach which thus redraws the boundaries between insider and outsider). . . . Fraught as it is with anxieties, displacements, and porous borders, a globalized model of Canadian citizenship may thus suggest a model in which seemingly fixed identities are only fixed in relation to others (45).*

#### VIEW IMAGES OF VERA FRENKEL'S *TRANSIT BAR* HERE

*Figure 6.7 Vera Frenkel, ...from the Transit Bar (1992). Six channel laser disk installation and functional piano bar. National Gallery of Canada. Photo: Charles Hupé.*

Multimedia artist Vera Frenkel's interactive installation . . . *from the Transit Bar* (1992) takes a very different approach to questions of home, homeland, and belonging by presenting the personal stories of fifteen of her friends whose families had immigrated to Canada. First exhibited at DOCUMENTA XI in Kassel Germany, . . . *from the Transit Bar* is an operational bar, where visitors can sit at tables and chitchat over drinks as six videos play on monitors installed throughout the constructed room. The participatory and social dimensions of the work make it an early example of relational aesthetics, an approach to artmaking that turns interactions between audience members into part of the work. For Frenkel, the types of spontaneous encounters that might happen within the fictional but functional space of the *Transit Bar* are vital to the experience of the piece. Perhaps you will sit with a friend for a while, or strike up a conversation with a stranger at a table. Maybe you'll find yourself alone in the familiar but strange setting to watch and reflect on monitors displaying fragmented recordings of people in Canada speaking about displacement, escape, and exile.

Although all the people who appear in the videos in this installation spoke English during the recordings, Frenkel overdubbed the videos in Polish and Yiddish, and added subtitles that alternate between German, French, and English. These modifications meant that the predominantly English and French speakers who viewed the work when it was first displayed at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa would be able to grasp only parts of the stories.

Sigrid Schade analyzes Frenkel's use of language and translation in . . . *from the Transit Bar*:

*National languages and dialects, accents, and slang, delineate the field within which a speaker is situated as belonging or foreign. Not only belonging to a community depends on the mastery of this field, but also participation in its goods: whether professions may be pursued, whether qualifications are recognized or love returned. . . . from the Transit Bar distinguished between national languages that have been politically and economically dominant in Europe since WWII (English, French, German), a national language that was marginalized (Polish), and a language that was almost extinguished or banished into exile along with those who spoke it (Yiddish). Only those who speak Polish and Yiddish can understand all the stories of the voice-over, whereas the dominant languages are fragmented and shifted into the marginality of the subtitles, only rendering part of the stories (2013, 160).*

Watch Vera Frenkel discuss . . . *from the Transit Bar* with the National Gallery of Canada:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=134#oembed-3>

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.7

Vera Frenkel describes . . . *from the Transit Bar* as “a place where uncertainty is a form of home.” Reflecting on what you now know about this work, what do you think she means by this description? How does uncertainty relate (or not) to your own understanding of home?



*Hometown Queen.*

Figure 6.8 Camille Turner, *Miss Canadiana (Home Town Queen Series)*, 2011. Photograph, 30.5 x 45.8 cm. Courtesy the Camille Turner.

Artist and art historian Bojana Videkanic has written that “creating art in the ‘Canadian’ context means challenging the ideas of multiculturalism, national identity, and social identity” (2006, 32). In different ways, each of the works discussed so far in this module participate in this struggle, and taken together, they show how it unfolds across many different contexts—political, personal, bureaucratic, social, cultural, and geographic, among others. Camille Turner’s satirical alter-ego “Miss Canadiana” is another example. Turner started performing as Miss Canadiana on Canada Day, July 1st, 2002. Dressed as a beauty queen in a bright red gown, a sparkling tiara, and a sash displaying her title, “Miss Canadiana,” she staged a guerrilla performance at the annual festivities celebrating the anniversary of Canadian Confederation on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Turner describes Miss Canadiana as a parody on “missing the mark of being Canadian” (Petty 2017, 171). However, the performance reveals as much about audiences as it does the performer.

As Sheila Petty explains,

*[Turner] wants people to interact and consider their personal response to her image as “all that is Canadian” — “a representation of Canadianess.” (Grant 2005, 21) Some credulous people have mistaken her for “Miss Canada,” the queen of a beauty pageant that ended in the 1980s. . . . She only dispels the myth if people ask, “Is this for real?” Turner has mused that she finds it fascinating that one can wear or put on an identity without people challenging or questioning it. In Dakar, Senegal, “a white French woman said to her, ‘When you are Miss Canadiana, I don’t even notice you’re black,” foregrounding whiteness as the always assumed neutral and presupposed category, which serves to reinforce difference rather than engaging with it (Barnard 2005, D4). . . . In essence, Turner is*

*appropriating and restyling Canada, seeking to right the erasure of black Canadian experience. In Regina, members of the Daughters of Africa group felt that Turner was taking their “image of black Canadian identity into the mainstream.” (Barnard 2005, D4) (Petty 2017, 173)*

Turner has performed as Miss Canadiana all over the world. In the *Hometown Queen* series, she brings the character back to Hamilton, Ontario, where her family immigrated to Canada from Jamaica, and where Turner lived from age nine until she was in her early twenties. The photographs in this series were created in Turner’s studio. She photoshops colour portraits of herself dressed as Miss Canadiana onto sepia-toned photos of places in Hamilton that hold significance to her, creating a sense of contrast between the figure and environment. The steel mill depicted in the photo above represents the local manufacturing industry and was where her father worked as a boilermaker.

According to TV Ontario, *Hometown Queen* is “ultimately is a photo about belonging and a search for a sense of home.” Watch TVO Arts’ short documentary about the origins of *Miss Canadiana* (2002-present) and the *Hometown Queen Series*:



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## Communities

The first two sections of this module explored belonging through the lenses of settler-colonialism, multiculturalism, and migration. In this final section, we will look closely at communities as sites of belonging. The story of St. John’s Ward at the beginning of the module is just one example of how processes of forced and voluntary migration have led to the formation and disappearance of vibrant communities across this country. Remember that the destruction of the multicultural Ward in Toronto was led by a municipal government and groups of citizens who didn’t think it belonged in the centre of “their” city. In this way, the Ward is a reminder that Canada’s multicultural cities have been sites of struggle over different ideas of belonging.

In Vancouver, a similar struggle to the one in the Ward played out in “Hogan’s Alley,” which was the popular name for the small area between Prior, Union, Main and Jackson Streets within the larger Strathcona neighbourhood in that city. Beginning in the early 1900s, Strathcona became home to many of Vancouver’s immigrant communities, who faced housing discrimination in other parts of the city. Its proximity to the Great Northern Railway station also made it a convenient location for the many Black men who worked as porters on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and formed the first Black railway workers’ union in 1917. Most of Strathcona’s Black residents concentrated in Hogan’s Alley, which grew into a vibrant cultural hub. Restaurants, speakeasies and music clubs, performance spaces, and other social and cultural institutions lined the streets along with residential dwellings. By many accounts, the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel at the corner of Prior and Jackson Avenue was the social heart of the community.

Listen to episode four of Historica Canada’s podcast, *A Place to Belong: A History of Multiculturalism in Canada*, on the development and destruction of Hogan’s Alley (first aired on June 16, 2021) CONTENT WARNING: This episode contains references to specific instances of anti-Black racism and violence.



 One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=134#oembed-5>

Like St. John's Ward, Hogan's Alley was variously neglected and targeted by the majority-white city's changing bylaws and investment in "urban renewal." In 1967, the City of Vancouver began demolishing the neighbourhood to construct a highway through the city. Although wider community activism ultimately thwarted the construction of the highway, it was not until after the first phase was completed and the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts had been built on Hogan's Alley.

In the early 1990s, filmmaker Cornelia Wyngaarden and curator Andrea Fatona started to research the disappeared neighbourhood, scouring municipal, media, and personal archives, and talking to people who lived there. Their 1994 documentary *Hogan's Alley* tells the story of the community through interviews with three women, Thelma Gibson, an African-Caribbean dance teacher, Pearl Brown, a local jazz singer, and Leah Curtis, who shares her experience as a lesbian growing up in Hogan's Alley in the 1960s. Each woman offers a different perspective on life in Hogan's Alley, reflecting some of the diversity of the neighbourhood and showing how even close-knit communities may be tenuous sites of belonging. As Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods explain, "All displaced persons from Africa to Africville have different desires for home. They want to build new homes in places that have barred their entry. They also want to reimagine the politics of place" (2007, 5-6).

Africville, near Halifax, Nova Scotia, was another African-Canadian community that was established in the 19th century and razed in the 1960s. Learn more about it in the Canadian Encyclopedia entry on Africville.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.8

Explore the Black Strathcona Project website. Listen to the stories of ten other inhabitants of Hogan's Alley. Based on what you learned about their experiences, how would you describe this community?

Vancouver-based conceptual artist Stan Douglas's *Circa 1948* (2014) offers yet another examination of Hogan's Alley. With support from the National Film Board of Canada, Douglas created historically accurate interactive 3D digital models of two long-lost Vancouver sites: Hogan's Alley and the Old Vancouver Hotel. Accessible through a free iOS app, *Circa 1948* allows users to navigate the neighbourhoods' streets and spaces, and to encounter the ghosts of their inhabitants. From the fragments of stories gathered through these encounters, users can piece together larger narratives about prejudices, threats, power dynamics, and bonds that shaped these communities.

Watch this short video walk through of Stan Douglas's *Circa 1948* app:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=134#oembed-6>

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.9

Download Stan Douglas's *Circa 1948* app and explore the streets of Hogan's Alley. How does it feel to be "in" the neighbourhood? How would you describe your relationship to Hogan's Alley as a user of Douglas's app?

*Circa 1948* is a very close study of a specific place at a specific moment in history. The spaces and places you see as you wander its digital streets are the result of extensive archival research and careful reconstruction. The stories, however, are fictional. In many of his works, Douglas combines site-specific exploration and storytelling to investigate and uncover erased or repressed histories.

Watch Stan Douglas talk about *Circa 1948* in relation to other works that explore the hidden histories of Vancouver on Art21 Season 8 (14 minutes 2016).

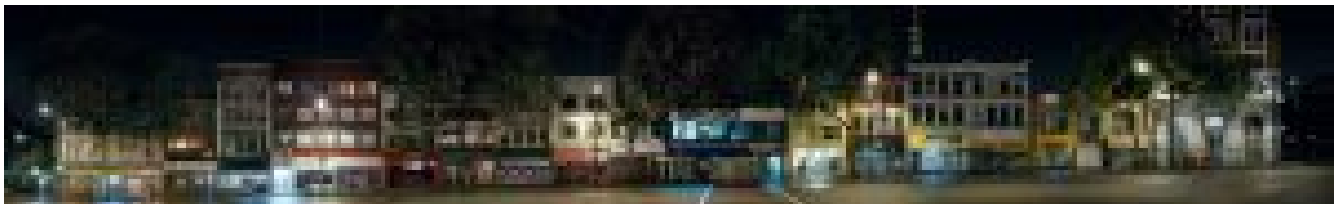


Figure 6.9 Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street*, 2001. Chromogenic print, 59.7 × 243.8 cm. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

Compare the representational strategies that Stan Douglas uses in *Circa 1948* and his earlier work *Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street* (2001), by reading this excerpt from Gabby Moser's *CanadARThistory* essay:

Unlike photojournalistic images of the neighbourhood, which show sidewalks busy with cars and people, Douglas photographs an empty West Hastings Street. While this is usually a bustling street, even late at night, the artist blocked off the sidewalk with city permits to photograph its sidewalks empty of people. If you look closely, temporary “no parking” signs dot the lampposts in the image. Without human subjects in the scene, the photograph recalls documentation of Hollywood film sets and studio constructions of city facades, referencing Vancouver’s history as ‘Hollywood North,’ an affordable stand-in for American cities in movies and television series. But removing the neighbourhood residents from the camera’s gaze is also a response to decades-long questions about the ethics of street photography, particularly when documenting poorer urban areas. The Downtown Eastside was often depicted in news media across Canada at the time Douglas was working, but while photojournalists frequently turned the camera’s lens towards the neighbourhood’s unhoused residents, the artist purposely removes them from view to avoid re-victimizing them a second time, as photographer Martha Rosler once famously argued.

Some of the bodies missing from the block were forcefully disappeared, however, by police enforcement of anti-loitering laws, or more nefariously, drug overdoses and the disappearances and deaths of women involved in sex work. Douglas’s ability to control the movement of bodies across the streetscape has led several commentators to question if a problematic power dynamic is still at play between the photographer and his unpictured subjects. It is telling that, in 2003, the Vancouver Book Award was presented as a tie between *Heroines* by Lincoln Clarkes—a series of black and white photographs, inspired by 1990s fashion advertising, of unnamed women subjects in the Downtown Eastside—and a small catalogue devoted to *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* produced by the Contemporary Art Gallery: a tie that speaks to the charged place the Downtown Eastside occupies in citizens’ imaginations.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.10

Compare and contrast *Circa 1948* and *Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street*. What strategies does Douglas use to evoke ideas of community and belonging without explicitly depicting people? Why do you think he does this?

#### VIEW KAREN TAM'S *TCHANG TCHOU KARAOKE LOUNGE* HERE

Figure 6.10 Karen Tam, *Tchang Tchou Karaoke Lounge* (2008-2010). Interactive installation with neon signs, rope light, wood, fabric, foam, disco ball, plexiglass, paper cutout, microphone, speakers, karaoke videos.

Montréal-based artist Karen Tam’s research focuses on the constructions and imaginations of “ethnic” spaces through installations in which she recreates Chinese restaurants, karaoke lounges, opium dens, curio shops and other sites of cultural encounters. Watch Tam’s 2020 lecture at Emily Carr University of Art and Design below.





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=134#oembed-7>

### LEARNING JOURNAL 6.11

Revisit your answer to Learning Journal 6.3. Has your understanding of the concepts of belonging and community changed after completing this module? How would you define these terms and your relationship to them now? Are there one or two artworks in particular that impacted your thinking? How and why?

### OBJECT STORIES

- Michelle Gewurtz on Shelley Niro, *Homage to Four in Paris* (2017)
- Gabrielle Moser on Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001)
- Christopher Régimbal on Vera Frenkel, *...from the Transit Bar* (1992)

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# ABROAD



Figure 7.1 Installation view of Canadian Section of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park in 1924. Reproduced by Art Canada Institute.

The black and white photograph above depicts an installation view of the “Canadian Section of Fine Arts” at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. Three large paintings by Tom Thomson (1877-1917) are featured prominently. From left to right, these paintings are: *The Jack Pine* (1916-7), *Northern River* (1914-5), and *The West Wind* (1916-7). Arranged below *The Northern River* are twelve additional panels by Thomson. Although later accounts describe the room as focused on landscape works by Thomson and his contemporaries the Group of Seven (Lawren S. Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, F.H. Varley, Frank Johnston, Franklin Carmichael and A.Y. Jackson), works by other artists, including several portraits, were also featured. One of the large artworks seen in the centre of the wall in the photograph is F.H. Varley’s *Portrait of Vincent Massey* (1920), and the canvas in the lower right corner (also by Varley) is *John* (1921), which was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada shortly after it was completed. Mirroring *John* on the other side of Thomson’s studies is a portrait of a young girl, possibly Emily Coonan’s *Girl in a Dotted Dress* (1923). In addition, interspersed between the landscapes is Regina Seiden’s *Old Immigrant Woman*, later known as *Old Immigrant Woman* (1922). The various paintings and prints are hung together tightly in a style reminiscent of 19th century French salon-style exhibitions. Three small sculptures are displayed on wooden plinths at eye level. At left and in the centre are Frances Loring’s *The Rod Turner* (1918) and *Furnace Girl* (1918-19), and the larger nude male figure on the right side of the image might be *The Indian* by A. Phimister Proctor.

For more on the British Empire Exhibition, watch this archival footage from the Smithsonian Channel. Consider the implications of empire. How are different people from the British Empire being represented?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-1>

The “Canadian Section of Fine Arts” was one small part of the Dominion display area in the Canadian Pavilion of the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley Park, England, from April 23rd to November 1st, 1924, and again later in 1925.

According to the exhibition catalogue:

*The story of Canadian art and artists cannot be told in the forward to a catalogue. It is not at all without romance, whether it is dealing with its earliest landscape painter, Paul Kane’s wanderings among the Indians, Cornelius Kreighoff’s inimitable studies of the life of the Quebec habitant or the later rise of the Canadian art societies such as the Ontario Society of the Artists and the Royal Canadian Academy in the seventies and eighties and the establishment of the National Gallery and other art institutions.*

*We are living in stirring times in the literal sense of the word. The Canadian fine arts are stirring, too, for which we may be devoutly thankful, for if they were not, they would be either dead or degenerate. Canada is having the opportunity of measuring her art for the first time against that of the other British Dominions at the British Empire Exhibition and whatever may be the relative verdict, Canada will at least show that she possesses an indigenous and vigorous school of painting and sculpture, moulded by the tremendously intense character of her country and colour of her seasons (National Gallery of Canada 1924, 3).*

When considering the legacy of Canadian art abroad, the Wembley exhibition is a pivotal starting point for understanding how nationalism is constructed through international exhibitions. The catalogue further hints at the aims of a regular programme of foreign exhibitions, suggesting they would “do an incalculable amount for the growth and public appreciation of art both at home and in the several dominions” (NGC, 4).

The 1924 Wembley “Canadian Section of Fine Arts” was the first of three major international exhibitions organized by the National Gallery of Canada to showcase the visual art of Canada. The following year, National Gallery of Canada Director Eric Brown and his jury revised the installation, but continued to focus on the landscapes of Thomson and the Group of Seven. In 1927, Brown was the sole curator of *Exposition d’art canadien* at the Musée de Jeu de Paume, adjacent to the Louvre in Paris. This exhibition focused even more heavily on the Group of Seven’s works, and added retrospectives of Thomson’s oeuvre as well as that of the recently deceased painter James Wilson (J.W.) Morrice.

However, as these case studies demonstrate, not all exhibitions of Canadian art were resounding successes. As art historian Leslie Dawn explains, complex cultural conditions affected the international reception of the National Gallery of Canada’s attempts to “establish a unified national image and identity, different from the nascent nation’s main colonial sources” (2007, 193). According to Dawn:

*The Wembley shows of 1924 and 1925 were triumphs. The British critics readily discerned and applauded the nationalist and modernist agendas within images of nature depicted as wilderness. The NGC collected the reviews and republished them in two anthologies for Canadian audiences as proof of the venture’s success (NGC, 1924). Both the reviews and the exhibitions figure prominently in the histories of Canada’s arts as validation of an emerging national identity in the 1920s.*

*The Parisian exhibition, however, provoked a different reception. The reviews were again collected and then translated, anticipating a third vindication (NGC, 1927). But problems arose. Bluntly put, the Paris exhibition failed. The responses were largely patronizing, if not negative. Confirmation of the works’ “nationality” and “modernity” was withheld, while the emphasis on landscapes was disparaged. The reviews were never made public. Indeed, their existence was obscured, even suppressed (McInnes,*

1950, 60). And for good reason. The negative responses from the centre of modernism destabilized the foundational premise, handed down to the present, that the British reception constituted a universal recognition of the works' uniqueness, originality, and difference, that is, its essentialized "Canadianness" (Davis 1973, 48-74).

*But the variations in national receptions raise other questions. Why did the British respond positively and the French negatively? Could one infer from the British appreciation that they were already predisposed to the new Canadian painting based on their own traditions? Were, then, the Group works a recapitulation rather than a repudiation of British landscape conventions and consequently a continuity of colonial culture rather than a break with it? Conversely, did these images and issues remain unreadable to French audiences, unfamiliar with the principles and codes of the picturesque and its implementation within colonial contexts? What are the consequences of such possibilities? (193-4).*

As Dawn makes clear, exhibitions are significant sites of nation-building. Art can be circulated abroad to success or failure. Art can also be exhibited domestically to international impact. This module considers how Canadian art circulates abroad, and to what end, as well as the dimensions of international representation within Canada. This module focuses on three central sites for international arts engagement: the circulation of Impressionism, the Venice Biennale, and the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.1

If you could share one work of Canadian art with someone abroad, what work would it be? Why? Select an artwork and write 3 to 4 sentences about what themes and ideas it might convey about Canada.

### By the end of this module you will be able to:

- describe how works of art allow us to consider international connections (e.g., Commonwealth, US-Canada, diaspora, etc.)
- discuss how Canadian artists encountered Impressionism abroad and how their engagement in modern painting styles connects to themes of intercultural and transnational hybridity, travel, exchange, and leisure
- explain Canada's participation in the Venice Biennale in the 20th and 21st centuries
- analyze how Indigenous artists exerted sovereignty over their self-representation at Expo 67
- consider art as a venue for self-representation and the articulation of identity.

### It should take you:

**Installation View** Text 10 min, Video 3 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**Impressionism in Canada** Text 25 min, Video 10 min

**Canada at the Venice Biennale** Text 20 min, Video 26 min

**Indians of Canada Pavilion** Text 15 min, Podcast 28 min, Video 18 min, Video 31 min, Video 4 min, Video 18 min, Podcast 36 min, Podcast 32 min

**Learning journals** 7 x 20 min = 140 min

**Total: approximately 7 hours**

## Key works:

- Fig. 7.1 Installation view of the Canadian Section of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park in (1924)
- Fig. 7.2 Maurice Cullen, *An African River* (1893)
- Fig. 7.3 Helen McNicoll, *Chintz Sofa* (c. 1912)
- Fig. 7.4 Frances M. Jones Bannerman, *The Conservatory* (1883)
- Fig. 7.5 J.W. Morrice, *Venice, Looking Out over the Lagoon* (about 1904)
- Fig. 7.6 Anne Kahane, *Queue* (1955)
- Fig. 7.7 Indians of Canada Pavilion (1967)
- Fig. 7.8 Henry Hunt and Tony Hunt, *Totem Kwakiutl* (1967)
- Fig. 7.9 Gerald Tailfeathers, *Blackfoot Design* (1967)

## Impressionism in Canada

*What, you may ask, does Canadian Impressionism look like? If only the answer was easy. A foreigner might guess at snow—a vastness of white-blanketed, frozen ground. It's true: Canadians have created some of the most bold yet sublime effet de neige paintings, but the Impressionists with Canadian roots display an adventurous diversity of vision and experience. They travelled, collaborated, and engaged with their international artistic peers. (Burrows 2019, 7)*

Read Dr. Beth Gersh-Nesic's "Impressionism, an introduction" on Smarthistory for background on Impressionism.

In the more than one hundred years since its inception, there has been a radical rethinking of the way that Impressionism has been positioned in the discipline of art history (Clark and Fowle 2020; Burns and Price 2021). For example, in the 1990s, feminist art historian Norma Broude not only reconsidered the gendering of the modern art movement, but also its international scope. More recently, the discipline of art history has sought to decolonize, globalize and, in turn, decentre histories of modernism. Impressionism is no longer viewed through a national framework that centres it as a purely French movement. Impressionism is not one fixed style, confined to a few dozen artists; nor is it a uniquely French art form. It is now viewed as an "aesthetic toolkit" (Burns and Price 2021, 5) of techniques, subjects, meanings, and applications which artists around the world adapted and reshaped to express local experiences and places while participating in a global historical discourse.

Arguably one of the most popular artistic movements, Impressionism should instead be viewed as a plurality of impressionisms, each iteration of which might be seen as a focal point for the contacts and exchanges so central to the movement's development. It was a truly international phenomenon, which, as the Canadian

examples in this section show, connects to themes of intercultural and transnational hybridity, travel, exchange, and leisure.

Impressionism was all about artists traveling abroad and coming back, their artworks, personalities, and relationships changing the course of Canadian art forever. Art historian Brian Foss claims, “By the end of the nineteenth century. . . it was clear that Impressionism was the first major statement of modernism in Canadian art” (2010, 24). To be taken seriously as a professional artist, one had to undertake rigorous academic training in the anatomy of the human body, draw from the live model, study the great works of art from books and prints—or ideally in collections of art in Europe—and learn from other professional art teachers. This was precisely what the early art academies in Europe had been set up to institutionalize, and so for Canadians who wanted to be taken seriously by their peers and by art collectors in Canada, they often travelled abroad to study, primarily in Paris, although a few also went to London.

Many Canadian artists studied at the Académie Julian or Académie Colarossi in Paris—private schools that did not have language requirements, making them very attractive to English-speaking artists from elsewhere. At these training centres, artists took life-drawing classes and learned the techniques and traditions of the great European masters. Paradoxically it was at these “French system” académies that Canadian artists first became acquainted with Impressionism. The artworks in this section signal the artistic networks and transnational connections that Canadian artists participated in. Frances Jones, Paul Peel, George A. Reid, Mary Heister Reid, William Blair Bruce, and countless others studied Impressionism and brought it back to Canada, transforming the art worlds in Toronto, Québec City, and Montreal in particular. Like their German, Swedish, or Australian contemporaries, Canadian artists were also important players in the transnational development of Impressionism.

One such artist was Maurice Cullen. The National Gallery of Canada describes his relationship with Impressionism: “Cullen depicted Canadian landscape in accordance with local terrain, light and colour. He composed his landscape paintings and pastels in keeping with European and Canadian tradition. His innovative use of luminous, Impressionist-influenced colours influenced the next generation of Canadian artists, especially the Group of Seven” (NGC 2022).

Cullen was born in St. John’s, Newfoundland in 1866 and arrived in Montreal as an infant. Although he showed an early interest in art, he was obliged at the age of 14 to find employment as a clerk at the local Gault Brothers fabric company. During the evenings, after work, he studied at the fledgling Institut National des Beaux-Arts et des Sciences. After five years of part-time study, he quit his job and studied sculpture full time. He was persuaded to go to Europe, and, as soon as Cullen set his eyes upon Impressionist works, he forgot all about sculpture and turned his attention to painting. Cullen spent each summer in France in the countryside at Giverny, Poldou, Pont Aven, and Moret-sur-Loing, where the great Impressionist Alfred Sisley lived and painted.

Collector François Thiébault-Sisson advised Cullen, “At the point where you have arrived, it would be disastrous to stay away from Paris for too long a period. You need to live here several years yet—to work in the midst of the artistic movement until you are fully master of yourself and secure of success here. I will do all I can to help you sell more of your pictures from time to time” (Atanassova 253). But against the advice of his friend, who clearly believed Cullen needed to stay in Europe, the artist decided to return to Quebec in December 1895. He was a man on a mission, determined to give Canadians the opportunity to appreciate the Impressionist art he loved—and to paint the Canadian landscape in his Impressionist style. In Montreal, critics initially gave him a warm reception, although this enthusiasm did not translate into sales. In January 1896, Cullen organized an exhibition in a storefront space he rented in the Art Association building on St. Catherine Street in Montreal, where he displayed about 100 paintings, including five that he had shown in the Paris Salon. The exhibition included scenes of Moret in the Forest of Fontainebleau, of far-away panoramas of Tunisia, Algiers, and Africa, and paintings of Quebec, including the Beaupré coast. *The Montreal Gazette* called his works exquisite and urged all art lovers in Montreal to visit the show, but hardly any of his paintings sold. Unfortunately for Cullen, most collectors still preferred to fill their homes with the subdued colours of the “finished” canvases by the



artists with the French Barbizon and Dutch Hague Schools, and they considered the pioneering artists' works gaudy, if not crude. Another exhibition in 1897 of his paintings was also a financial flop.



Figure 7.2 Maurice Cullen, *An African River*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 54 x 81.3 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikimedia user Rlbberlin.

For art historian Marin Young, in the history of Canadian Impressionism one particular example stands out as a “mixture of French Impressionist technique and French imperialist iconography” and an exemplar of “the assumed synthesis of local and international World Impressionism.” Read an excerpt from Young’s essay on Maurice Cullen’s *An African River* (1893) here:

*A Canadian Impressionist is simply an Impressionist in Canada. The colored marks on an Impressionist canvas are the same, the standard argument goes, as the “impressions” received from the corner of nature in front of which the painter stood when producing the painting. (Young) This is what makes an Impressionist painting Impressionist. The stylistic means of conveying this generative logic as a significant part of a painting nonetheless emerged out of a distinctly French pictorial tradition. Indeed, most all Canadian Impressionists learned their technique in France. Non-French iconographies depicted by non-French artists could thus be assimilated to the history of French art. . . . Cullen was preparing to return to Canada after a successful six years abroad, studying and working in Paris. Having abandoned his academic training with Jean-Léon Gérôme and Alfred-Philippe Roll, he had come to embrace the plein-air painting then gripping the fancy of North American expatriate artists in France—and with some success. In early 1895, he had become the first Canadian elected as an associate member of the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, and the French State had purchased one of his paintings at the Salon that year. He was surely optimistic for the public reception in his home*



town. No critical evaluation of Cullen's work survives from the autumn of 1895, however, so it is all but impossible to know what the Canadian public made of such a picture. Some viewers would certainly have been able to situate the iconography within the broader artistic tendency called Orientalism. Cullen's training with Gérôme would only have confirmed such a reading. (Nochlin) The palm trees in the background and the man on a donkey clothed in a white burnous situates the "African river" more precisely in North Africa, in the *mahgreb*. And for those who looked closely in 1895, the artist's inscription marking the location of his motif was still visible on the canvas: the location is Biskra, an oasis town in Algeria, a destination of growing popularity for French and other European tourists.

...

For a well-travelled viewer in 1895, the small structure in the background of Cullen's painting might also have been recognizable. Situated on the edge of the embankment, to the left of the palm trees, is the tomb of a holy man, usually called a *qubba* or, in North Africa, a *marabout* (also the word for the holy man buried in the tomb) (Jenkins 10). . . . [Cullen] sought to compel the conviction that he had rendered his motif as directly as possible. Or to put it differently, the artist selected his motif carefully and sought to convey how he painted it in situ, from a precise place: seated next to the Oued Biskra, observing the play of shadow and light, of reflections on water.

As early as 1891, Cullen had been singled out as an artist who "rather inclines towards the impressionist school" (Antoniou 5). And, upon his return to Canada, he was called "an impressionist of the modern French school" (Antoniou 11). What this meant, primarily, is that the painter used broken brushstrokes and high-keyed colour. This has certainly been the quality of *An African River* most readily noted by viewers ever since. As Dennis Reid put it in 1990, the canvas "reveals a bold ability to describe the fraying fragmentation of forms as observed under the intense southern sunlight that suggests an affinity to the closer analysis of the Impressionists" (Reid 96). Reid alerts us here to Cullen's use of abbreviated brushstrokes throughout the canvas. The rendering of the reflections on the water offers a good example of his sketchy facture, but the technique is also visible in the greenish and reddish tints applied on top of the ground at left. Even closer to Impressionist practice is Cullen's treatment of the modifications of local color under the conditions of full exterior illumination. Most striking in this regard is his use of purple hues in the rendering of shadows on the riverbank cliffs at right. These formal effects, coded as the record of perceptions obtained directly *en plein air* was precisely what defined Impressionism for the global generation of the time.

...

Such "site-specific" painting became Cullen's default mode throughout the rest of his career. After the failure to find traction at the Montreal exhibitions of 1895 and early 1896, he began to paint a series of canvases in and around Quebec City. In this campaign, he reversed his Biskra motif of sunlit sand and began painting the subject that would define his career: snow. "No Canadian painter has approached Mr. Cullen in his delineation of snow in sunshine," wrote Margaret Laing Fairburn in 1907 (Fairbairn 12) (Young 2021, 75-94).

As Young points out, Cullen developed his own method and techniques in his home country, but his time abroad had an immense impact on his career. Back in Quebec, he sketched out-of-doors, even if it meant standing in freezing temperatures on snowshoes. He made his own small painting boards from the wood of young poplars; after drying them in heat, he plunged them in boiling linseed oil and painted them with a layer of white lead. Once he arrived at his chosen painting place, he made several sketches on these carefully prepared boards, later selecting the ones he wanted to develop into canvases, which he painted in his studio, often during the summer months. His palette mirrored the clear, high colours of the French Impressionists, but he did not break his brushstrokes to the same degree as many of his French colleagues did. He applied his colour in solid strokes so that his forms did not fragment. In one of his most famous paintings, *Logging in Winter, Beaupré* (1896), we can see his masterful handling of light on snow and his abilities at translating

Impressionist techniques to a Canadian scene, leaving little wonder that he was seen as a major inspiration for the Group of Seven working some years later.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.2

Think of a time you traveled. Where did you go? Why were you there? What did you learn? Did it change your perspective?

Advances in technology and transportation meant that by 1880 transatlantic shipping lines were established to facilitate travel to Europe. At the same time, social conventions that had governed the lives of upper-class women, such as the idea that an escort was required for any engagement outside the home, had come to seem pointless and unnecessary. The academies of Paris and London offered training that was vastly superior to that offered in Canada, especially for women. As students in these cities, young women benefited from access to the finest art galleries and museums in the world; they could join the lively communities of artists there; and the picturesque countryside was nearby for sketching trips. Florence Carlyle, Laura Muntz Lyall, and Helen McNicoll were among those who ventured to Europe to study.

Private ateliers or schools were more inclined to take female students but charged a higher rate for them than for male students, thus making attendance a privilege only for the wealthy or those lucky few who were assisted by relatives. Still, more and more women signed up. In 1801, only twenty-eight women artists exhibited in the Paris Salon. By 1878, that number had grown to 762; by the year 1900, more than 1,000 of the exhibitors were women. Although women's participation in art schools increased markedly in the late 19th century, they still struggled. The opportunity to study the nude model was restricted for women, as was instruction in anatomy: women students instead drew from engravings and casts of torsos. Many of the art associations allowed women members but prohibited their participation in decision-making or in upper-level positions. As a result, independent clubs surfaced for women only; while they addressed some of the crucial issues facing female artists, such groups tended to act as buffers, further insulating or marginalizing women from the general development of the visual arts. Despite the growing involvement of women in the suffrage movements of the early 19th century, women still found it difficult to participate in society as individuals.



Figure 7.3 Helen McNicoll, *The Chintz Sofa*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 99.1 cm. Private collection, Thornhill ON. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

During her lifetime, Helen McNicoll was frequently referred to as a “painter of sunshine,” a fitting description for an artist who, in her mature years, practiced the classic broken-colour impressionism of Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley, with its preoccupation with light for its own sake. McNicoll is today best known for her Impressionistic canvases depicting children, family, and friends often posed in tranquil domestic scenes, languid afternoons at the seashore, and in intimate interior scenes. McNicoll grew up in Montreal in a family that encouraged her artistic aspirations, and their wealth and position as part of the Anglophone Protestant elite enabled her to study art in Montreal and later in England, France and Italy. She contracted scarlet fever when she was two years old, and became deaf as a result, but it did not hold her back. McNicoll first studied with the accomplished artist William Brymner at the Art

Association of Montreal. He stressed working directly from nature, and McNicoll’s work confirms that she followed his example. Her landscapes and seascapes, genre scenes and figure works reveal her interest in capturing the subtle plays of light and shade found in nature. Brymner recognized the skill of his student and encouraged her to go to the Slade School of Art, University of London, to complete her studies, which she did in 1902.

Katarina Atanassova, Senior Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery of Canada writes of McNicoll:

*McNicoll had swiftly become a leading practitioner of Impressionism among her contemporaries. After graduating under [William] Brymner in Montreal, she went to England to expand her art studies with Algernon Talmage at St. Ives in Cornwall and absorbed certain aspects of British Impressionist painting in the country. Her Stubble Fields, c. 1912, is an example of the landscape studies for which she garnered recognition as an impressionist painter. McNicoll returned to the subject of haystacks on a number of occasions, suggesting that she was familiar with Monet’s preoccupation with the same subject, perhaps as early as 1905 when his paintings were shown at an exhibition organized by the Durand-Ruel gallery in London.*

McNicoll’s immense talent in handling light—sunshine in particular—can be seen in *Stubble Fields*, and was very likely influenced, as Atanassova notes, by Claude Monet’s almost obsessive focus on the optical qualities of light on haystacks in his own series from the 1880s and 1890s.

It was no easy feat to be a woman artist in this period, and McNicoll’s female friendships with fellow artist Dorothea Sharp, in particular, were key to her success. As Samantha Burton writes,

*Perhaps the greatest challenge for women was in being acknowledged as “professional” artists. Although women—especially women of high social standing like McNicoll—had long been encouraged to draw and paint as a demonstration of their refinement, they had difficulty in rising above the status of amateur in the eyes of art historians and curators. McNicoll does not seem to have suffered from this perception; she exhibited widely and sold her work to public institutions and private collectors. Indeed, her obituary emphasized her professionalism, saying that “Miss McNicoll was no amateur—there are few painters in the Dominion who take their art as seriously as she did.” (Saturday Night 3)*

*However, McNicoll’s reputation after her death seems to have been affected by this issue. When histories of Canadian art began to be written in the 1920s, McNicoll was omitted, as were most of her female colleagues. In a new nationalist narrative, wild, open landscapes were given precedence over quiet domestic scenes such as McNicoll’s *Beneath the Trees*, c. 1910. Not until the late twentieth century*



did McNicoll and her peers begin to see some recognition as practising professionals, largely due to the efforts of feminist art historians and curators who have attempted to recuperate their work. Still, research on Canadian women artists in the years before the First World War continues to lag far behind that on their female peers in France, England, and the United States (2017).



Figure 7.4 Frances M. Jones Bannerman, *In the Conservatory*, 1883. Oil on canvas. Nova Scotia Public Archives, Nova Scotia.

Read Samantha Burton's *CanadARThistories* essay on Frances M. Jones Bannerman's *The Conservatory* (1983) [here](#).

Watch Samantha Burton's short lecture on the work of Helen McNicoll and the question: *What makes art Canadian?*



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-2>

Another artist to travel widely abroad was James Wilson (J.W.) Morrice. His oeuvre is filled with scenes of Spain and Italy, North Africa, and the Caribbean. As Sandra Paikowsky notes despite his travels, he maintained a studio in Paris “with ready access to galleries, exhibitions, newspapers, art, and illustrated magazines, and conversations with his wide circle of artistic and literary friends. Morrice was a first-hand witness to the evolution of the original Impressionists” (2019, 73).

In the essay “James Wilson Morrice: Venice at the Golden Hour,” Dennis Reid describes Morrice’s relationship with the city of Venice as follows:

*James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924) was born and raised in Montreal, and although he studied law in Toronto and was called to the Ontario bar in 1889, he was by then already exhibiting professionally as an artist. In 1890 he left Canada to study painting in London, and in the fall of 1891 he moved to Paris and enrolled in the Académie Julian, where he became involved with other English-speaking painters who introduced him to painting locales around France and drew him into the Anglo-American circle of artists and writers that had gathered around the famous American artist James McNeill Whistler.*

*That connection may have piqued his initial interest in Venice, which was a favourite subject of Whistler’s. Morrice first visited Venice in 1894. He returned for a longer stay in 1897 and for a visit of some duration in the summer of 1901, then again in 1902, 1904 and 1907. He began exhibiting Venetian work in 1902, canvases painted in his Paris studio based on oil sketches and drawings. He participated in the Venice Biennale twice—in 1903 and 1905—but showed French subjects.*

*Morrice exhibited regularly in the Paris Salon and in major exhibitions in London and Canada, and his Venetian work came just when he was beginning to receive regular praise from international critics. One of the most memorable of his Venetian canvases, however, seems not to have been shown in a catalogued exhibition during his lifetime, and remained in his hands until his death.*

Decades later in 1903, when Morrice’s work was selected by the National Gallery to represent the country at the Venice Biennale, he was positioned as a key point of origin for the European influence on Canadian art:

*He is probably the best painter Canada has yet produced, and his position is enhanced by the fact of his being the first to introduce Canada to modern movements in art. Before him, we were an artistic backwater into which European movements arrived a quarter of a century late; after him we began to swim in the full stream of western art. In his own time Morrice could not have been what he was by remaining in Canada. He was born in Montreal and, after a short period spent studying law in Toronto, he became an expatriate in Paris...Later he became the friend of some of the most important painters*



Figure 7.5 JW Morrice, *Venice, Looking Out over the Lagoon*, about 1904. Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 60.6 x 73.9 cm. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. Uploaded by Wikimedia user Pymouss.



*of his time, notably the Fauves. (NGCA, NGCF, Canadian Exhibitions – Foreign, Venice Biennale, 1958, Hubbard, “Canada,” 1958, 159)*

Morrice was the first Canadian artist to exhibit at the Venice Biennale, first showing in 1903 and then again in 1905 when *On the Cliff, Normandy* (c. 1902) and *Regatta at San Malo* (c. 1905) were hung in Room V of the Central Pavilion, housing Italian and International works in eleven different galleries (Paikowsky 1999, 131).

## Canada at the Venice Biennale

*The promotion abroad of a notion of Canada is not a luxury but an obligation, and a more generous policy in this field would have important results, both concrete and intangible. . . . Exchanges with other nations in the field of the arts and letters will help us to make our reasonable contribution to civilized life. (“The Projection of Canada Abroad” Massey Report, Section V)*

Although Morrice was the first Canadian to exhibit in the 5th and 6th Biennales, he participated as an individually invited artist, not as a national representative. As a country Canada did not have formal representation with a national pavilion until 1952. This debut appearance, Sandra Paikowsky notes, “positioned Canada on the world stage and marked the first significant ‘projection’ abroad” of the country’s aesthetic identity following the Second World War (1999, 131).

According to Paikowsky,

*The groundwork for Canada’s participation in the 1952 Venice Biennale was being prepared at home. In the political arena, Canada’s impressive presence on the international stage during World War II and her subsequent record as an aggressive advocate of post-war collective security pacts brought her new recognition as a middle power... prior to Canada’s first participation at the Biennale in 1952, her cultural presence in Italy was rather limited. The Information Division of the Department of External Affairs had expressed an interest in art exhibitions in 1949, although it was decided that education was a more pressing matter. A year later External Affairs attempted to involve the National Gallery, or more accurately its Design Centre, in exhibitions of “Decorative and Industrial Modern Art and Modern Architecture in Milan,” but this took several years to come about. The two agencies did cooperate in 1950 in writing an article entitled “Canadian Art Abroad,” published in the government’s magazine External Affairs. However, the Department noted in an internal memorandum that the relations with the National Gallery were “not good.” Meanwhile, the National Gallery lent Renaissance works from its permanent collection to a few Italian exhibitions and it was involved in the 1949 presentation of engravings and gouaches by Roloff Beny and gouaches by Robert LaPalme in Rome. It also assisted in “Il Mostra Internazionale di Bianco e Nero” held in Lugano shortly before the opening of the 1952 Venice Biennale, which included work by Albert Dumouchel, Lilian Freiman, Jack Nichols and Alfred Pellan. This weak record of Canadian cultural activities in Europe, however, would receive attention with the establishment of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.*

*The import of the 1949-1951 Massey Commission has received lengthy examination in the discourse on Canadian cultural nationalism. (1999, 134-5)*

Canada’s first national representation in 1952 included selected works by Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts, and Alfred Pellan. A retrospective of J.W. Morrice’s contributions to Canadian art was mounted in 1958, juxtaposing his oeuvre with the next generation of artists from Montreal: painter Jacques de Tonnancour, sculptor Anne Kahane, and printmaker Jack Nichols.

See footage of the 1958 Canada Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in Katherine Giguère’s 2020 documentary *Open Sky, Portrait of a Pavilion in Venice*.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-3>

In her thesis on Canada's participation at the Venice Biennale in the 1950s, art historian Elizabeth Diggon comments on the exhibition in the newly constructed space:

*Given the pavilion's symbolic significance to the NGC as Canada's "coming of age" within postwar biennial culture, the NGC required an actual exhibition to accompany the pavilion. The NGC opted to present a Morrice retrospective (as the major component of the exhibition, along with works by contemporary artists Jacques de Tonnancour, Anne Kahane and Jack Nichols. Morrice had exhibited extensively in France and Britain and maintained an excellent reputation abroad. Given his past successes in Europe, Morrice was an undeniably safe choice. Additionally, his lengthy stays in France led to working relationships with major French painters including Henri Matisse; relationships that were credited as being highly influential and beneficial for Morrice's work.*

*Of the included artists, Morrice is undeniably the focal point. However it is important to note that the new pavilion is discussed first. Jacques de Tonnancour, a Quebecois landscape painter, is given a paragraph later in the catalogue, which discusses the evolution of his painting style, with particular emphasis placed on his work, which was influenced by the School of Paris. Anne Kahane and Jack Nichols—a sculptor and painter/printmaker, respectively—the other two contemporary artists included in the Biennale, are given almost incidental mention in the catalogue entry's final paragraph.*

*. . . Nichols, Kahane and, to a lesser extent, Tonnancour are treated as ancillary additions to the Morrice retrospective. Given the characterization of Morrice as the entry point for European influence into Canadian art, they are effectively situated as three of many Canadian artists who were indirectly influenced by Morrice. These priorities are emphasized by the number of works chosen for each artist: twenty-two from Morrice, eleven from Tonnancour, seven from Nichols, and five from Kahane (2012, 72).*

Born in 1917, Jacques de Tonnancour studied at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal in the late 1930s, but left to pursue more innovative approaches to painting, later joining the Contemporary Arts Society of Montreal in 1942. The National Gallery of Canada describes his travels abroad, noting:

*In 1945, de Tonnancour was awarded a grant by the government of Brazil and settled in Rio de Janeiro for sixteen months. He created a number of major canvases inspired by his luxurious and exotic environment there (The Sugar Loaf, Rio de Janeiro, 1946). Upon his return to Canada, de Tonnancour became disenchanted with the more familiar landscape of his homeland and turned to still life and studies of people, strongly influenced by Picasso and Matisse, such as Seated Girl (II) (1953). In the mid-1950s, travels in the Laurentians, northern Ontario and Vancouver revived his passion for the Canadian countryside and its vast spaces. His progression toward representing these led him to develop, starting in 1959, his "squeegee" technique. Abstraction followed soon after, as he explored mixed techniques and "hieroglyphics" in his later works, such as Epitaph (1968). His participation in conferences in South America during the 1980s renewed his interest in entomology and he abandoned painting in order to devote himself to collecting and photographing insects. (NGC 2022)*

VIEW ANNE KAHANE'S QUEUE HERE

Figure 7.6 Anne Kahane, *Queue*, 1955. Wood, 63.5 x 122 x 24 cm. National Gallery of Canada.

Similarly, Anne Kahane became known internationally for her sculpture:

*Born in Vienna in 1924, Anne Kahane immigrated to Montreal with her parents when she was two. After attending the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, she studied at the Cooper Union School in New York City from 1945 to 1947. In 1953, Kahane won a prize at the first International Sculpture Competition sponsored by the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. In 1958, she represented Canada at the*

Venice Biennale. She quickly gained prominence as an artist, with exhibitions at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, among others.

From 1950 until the 1970s, Kahane favoured wood as a medium. During the period, she created several public artworks, including one for Montreal's Place des Arts. By 1978, she had switched to sheets of aluminum, a material that gave her a flexibility impossible to obtain with wood. Although the brass sculpture in the Town's collection was made long before the late 1970s, it departs from the esthetic criteria in fashion at the time by stepping away from abstraction and using construction and assembly as opposed to the more traditional techniques of modelling and direct carving (Ville de Montreal 2022).

To learn more about the other artist included in the 1958 exhibition at the Canada Pavilion, watch Jack Nichols speak about his work:



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Deanna Schmidt provides this thoughtful history of Canada's participation at the Venice Biennale:

As the name suggests, the *La Biennale di Venezia / Venice Art Biennale* takes place in Venice, Italy, every two years and is widely considered the most significant global contemporary art exposition. Often referred to as the "Olympics of the Art World," the Biennale brings together almost a hundred countries that collectively showcase the work of a formidable group of artists chosen to represent their home nations.

A consistent theme of nationhood has been a part of the Biennale since its inception, positioning artists and their artwork within larger political contexts and narratives. The first iteration opened on April 30, 1895, at a newly constructed pavilion in the public *Giardini della Biennale / Biennale Gardens* of Castello, the largest of the *sestieri* (districts) of the city. The genesis for a Venetian-organized contemporary art festival grew out of the success of the 1887 *Esposizione Artistica Nazionale / National Art Exposition* hosted in the city and is now attributed to Riccardo Selvatico, then mayor of Venice, Antonio Fradeletto, member of city council, and philosopher Giovanni Bordiga. "The international emphasis was deliberate and productive, reflecting the ambition to make the exhibition an international event," observes Margaret Plant, and, "in this way it diverged significantly from previous national expositions, although Italian and Venetian art were well represented." In that first year, 285 artists (with a total of 516 works) from France, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands and other countries participated.

Today, the main venue of the Biennale is located at the eastern tip of the island of Venice, occupying one of the city's few green spaces. These *Giardini* are a product of major urban renovations made under Emperor Napoleon I after the fall of the Venetian Republic at the hands of the French in 1797. Since then, however, the site has gradually been adopted and transformed into a pseudo-international village with many of the participating nations constructing highly individualized permanent architectural pavilions to house their country's biannual offering, affording each nation (who has the space and resources) independence to determine its representation.

Canada's formal representation at the Biennale began in 1952 with an exhibition of paintings by Alfred Pellán, Goodridge Roberts, Emily Carr and David Milne mounted in the Canadian room in the *Padiglione Italia / Italian Pavilion* (later renamed *Padiglione Centrale / Central Pavilion*). Within the Central Pavilion countries were organized alphabetically, with Cuba and Brazil as Canada's neighbours, providing an early example of how the dominance of national participation shapes visitor experience. The significance of such inclusion at the Biennale to Canada was noted by Donald Buchanan, then



*Director of the Industrial Design Division of the National Gallery of Canada, in the 1952 summer issue of Canadian Art. "Canada now takes its place with most of the other nations of the free world in this assembly of the arts," he noted. Only six years later, Canada inaugurated its own permanent pavilion.*

Read more about the Venice Biennale and Canadian participation in this essay by Deanna Schmidt.

Watch The Art Assignment video, "Art Trip: Venice Biennale" which tours you around the 2017 Biennale:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-5>

### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.3

Find the website for the upcoming Venice Biennale. When is the next edition? What is the curatorial approach to the event? What types of works and artistic approaches are being emphasized? Has the Canadian representative been announced?

*Artists who have represented Canada at the Venice Biennale:*

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 68 Emily Carr, David Milne, Goodridge Roberts, Alfred Pellan  
 19 BC Binning, Paul-Emile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle  
 70 Jack Shadbolt, Louis Archambault, Harold Town  
 19 James Wilson Morrice, Jacques de Tonnancour, Anne Kahane, Jack Nichols  
 72 Edmund Alleyn, Graham Coughtry, JeanPaul Lemieux, Frances Loring, Albert Dumouchel  
 19 Jean-Paul Riopelle  
 76 Harold Town, Elza Mayhew  
 19 Alex Coville, Yves Gaucher, Sorel Etrog  
 78 Ulysse Comtois, Guido Molinari  
 19 Michael Snow  
 80 Gershon Iskowitz, Walter Redinger  
 19 Greg Curnoe  
 82 Ron Martin, Henry Saxe  
 19 Collin Campbell, Pierre Falardeau & Julien Poulin, General Idea, Tom Sherman, Lisa Steele,  
 Paterson Ewen  
 84 Ian Carr-Harris, Liz Magor  
 19 Melvin Charney, Krzysztof Wodiczko  
 86 Roland Brener, Michel Goulet  
 19 Genevieve Cadieux  
 88 Robin Collyer  
 19 Edward Poitras  
 90 Rodney Graham  
 19 Tom Dean  
 93 Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller  
 19 Jana Sterbak  
 95 Rebecca Belmore  
 19 David Altmejd  
 97 Mark Lewis  
 19 Steven Shearer  
 99 Shary Boyle  
 20 BGL  
 01 Geoffrey Farmer  
 20 Isuma  
 03 Stan Douglas  
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#### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.4

Select one of the artists from the list above. Find out what you can about their contribution to the Venice Biennale. Why do you think they were selected? What works were shown?

Deanna Schmidt describes recent participation by Canadian artists:

*In recent years, there has also been an increasing acknowledgement of the politics and privilege tied to exhibiting at the Biennale. Framing her solo exhibition Music for Silence at the 55th Biennale in 2013, Toronto-based Shary Boyle presented a silent, 35 mm film featuring a deaf woman signing the poem Silent Dedication (2013), which Boyle also read aloud at the opening. Serving as a direct reminder to those in attendance of their position, the poem asked audiences to consider who was not present at the Biennale and why that may be.*

*In turn, Geoffrey Farmer's A way out of the mirror in 2017 coincided with the country's sesquicentennial celebrations, inhabiting the Pavilion mid-renovation with material and metaphoric rubble from 150 years of national construction, including rebar from the Peter Pitseolak School in Kinngait (Cape Dorset), NU, that burned down in 2015.*

*Still, whether lauded or loathed, the Canada Pavilion remains material scaffold for larger concepts of nation-building—political, economic and artistic—as they continue to transform. As the collective Isuma prepares to release their newest film One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk (2019) and live streaming project Silakut Live inside the Pavilion that, together, explore the damages of this colonial project, perhaps there is no better home.*

*Isuma the artist collective from Igloolik, Nunavut represented Canada at the 58th Venice Biennale in May 2019. The NGC described their methods noting, "Using the internet as a tool, Isuma uses this technology as a vessel for Inuit knowledge and engages with the core value of being accessible. They encourage as many people as possible to have access to their video work. This includes their website which is used to pass on this information, that Inuit find important along with many other people living on our planet. This year, with a grounding in Venice, two methods of communication and storytelling are presented."*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.5

Go to Isuma TV online and explore the platform. Take note of the different ways you can explore the

videos on this website. Identify a video you are interested in and watch it. Please answer the following questions about the video once you have viewed it:

- How did you make your video selection? For example, did you search by topic or select a recommended video?
- Describe the video work you watched. Is there a narrative? What happens?
- Think about the aesthetic strategies employed in creating the video. What formal choices did the creators make? For instance, you might describe the types of shots used, the lighting and colour, etc.

Considering Isuma's representation, Lori Blondeau notes: "When Edward [Poitras] and Rebecca [Belmore] showed there it was such a huge thing, I remember, and now Isuma is there too. I think it is important to recognize them like this because of the great work they do. Not only in what they produce, but also the way they involve the whole community in their work" (Igloliorte 2019).

Read Heather Igloliorte's essay "Indigenous Art on a Global Stage" to learn more about the impact that the Venice Biennale has had on the lives and careers of Indigenous artists.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.6

Imagine you are invited to program the Canada Pavilion at the next Venice Biennale. What contemporary artist (or artists) would you choose to exhibit? Consider the field of Canadian contemporary art, the history of Canadian programming at the Venice Biennale (both in the pavilion and off site), and also the audiences—curators, artists, museum workers, collectors, donors, diplomats, students, tourists, the general public, and many others—who will see your exhibition.

- Explain your choice of artist with reference to their practice, career stage, and suitability for this opportunity.
- Discuss two works by the artist you would like to include in the pavilion. Be sure to provide a visual analysis of the works! Include at least two figures in your assignment.
- Justify your choices for the pavilion in relation to the context of Canadian representation at the biennale.

Discuss how the work of the artist (or artists) you select will connect with diverse international audiences. What messages do you hope to convey, and why?

## Indians of Canada Pavilions at Expo 67



*Figure 7.7 Indians of Canada Pavilion, 1967, 1967. Photograph. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. This reproduction is a copy of the version available at <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=fonandco&IdNumber=4978991&new=-8585565704173500946>.*

Learn about the Indigenous art featured at Expo 67 in Montreal in this conversation between Monika Kin Gagnon, Heather Igloliorte, and John Moses. Note how Expo 67 was a key moment for Indigenous control over representation—what Igloliorte refers to as “curators of their own histories.” (28 minutes)

Historically, international cultural events have been an important site for issues of representation. These events occur not only abroad in places like Venice, but also in domestic contexts intended for international audiences.

As Magdalena Milosz argues, Expo 67 was an important site for Indigenous representation. The Indians of Canada Pavilion was the first large-scale exhibition of Indigenous art organized by Indigenous people in Canada. As Milosz writes: “Expo 67 in Montreal was different in that First Nations took control of their own representation on the world stage. Artists created contemporary works that defied stereotypes while the exhibits inside the pavilion presented a critical—and subversive—narrative of First Nations-state relations. Yet the federal government remained significantly involved in the pavilion’s creation, notably through the design of its architecture. The pavilion can thus be read as a contact zone between Indigenous and settler-colonial representations, illuminating First Nations’ struggles for sovereignty at the moment of Canada’s centennial” (Milosz 2021).

Learn more about the connections between settler colonialism and J.W. Francis’ architecture, in this article by architectural historian Magdalena Milosz.

The Indians of Canada Pavilion was designed by settler architect J.W. Francis. Francis was the architect for Indian Affairs; in this capacity he also designed projects including residential schools and model homes for Indigenous communities across Canada. As Milosz notes, the pavilion “become a complex site of negotiation as a committee of Indigenous representatives struggled to reclaim their nations’ representation on the world stage” (2021).

Check out Magdalena Milosz’s object story, which examines the design process for the Indians of Canada Pavilion and assesses the building itself. Milosz employs settler-colonial theory as a lens to discuss the tensions and contradictions of using a government-designed pavilion to represent Indigenous communities in an international exposition. Further, Milosz speaks to the ways in which Indigenous artists and exhibition designers reclaimed the pavilion’s narrative to tell a more critical story of Indigenous relationships with the settler state. She argues that the pavilion is “a highly visible example of one of many twentieth-century architectures that constituted ‘sites of encounter’ between Indigenous peoples and the settler state of Canada. The pavilion allows us to question the notion of architecture as a neutral, unchanging backdrop for politics and examine architecture itself as political, and in particular the forms of power and resistance registered at this particular site.”





Figure 7.8 Henry Hunt and Tony Hunt, Totem Kwakiutl, 1967. Sculpture (wood, paint), 2130 x 95 cm. Parc Jean-Drapeau, Île Notre-Dame, Montreal. Photograph by Michel Dubreuil, 2008. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

Outside the pavilion was Henry Hunt and Tony Hunt's Totem Kwakiutl, created in 1967. Still standing on Ile Notre-Dame, as the Art Public of Ville de Montreal website describes, the pole differs from poles traditionally erected:

*Sculpted from a red-cedar trunk, it comprises six mythological figures placed vertically: Gwa'wis (Sea Crow), Gila (Grizzly Bear and Salmon), Sisiutl (Two-headed Snake), Makhinukhw (Killer Whale with Seal in Its Mouth), Tsawi (Beaver), and Numas (Old Man). Some sections of the pole are painted red, green, or black, whereas other sections have been left unpainted.*

*The Kwakiutl totem pole differs from poles traditionally erected on reserves in that it was a commission from outside of Aboriginal culture for the 1967 World Fair. It was produced in relation to the aesthetic code in force on the Pacific Northwest coast. The six mythological figures portrayed are emblems of a number of KwaKwaka'wakw clans and do not draw on a particular family line, in order to illustrate that all of these clans are acting together.*

*The artwork was an integral part of the concept for the Canadian Indians pavilion at the 1967 World Fair. Today, it is the only remaining vestige of the pavilion, which recognized the contribution of Indigenous nations to Canadian society and the unique nature of their cultures. At the inauguration of the artwork, on 10 February 1967, a ceremony in the Kwakiutl tradition complemented the official speeches.*

Born in Fort Rupert, British Columbia, Henry Hunt (1923-1985) was known for his carved sculptures and

research on all forms of art of Pacific Coast Indigenous cultures. Between 1962 and 1974, he was chief sculptor at the Royal British Columbia Museum, where his son, Tony, served as his assistant. During their careers, the two men created, together or individually, numerous totem poles that are on display all over the world. For example, in 1970 they jointly produced a totem pole for the Osaka World Fair.

The Hunts were trained through the passing of knowledge from generation to generation, reaching back to Charlie James, a renowned late-nineteenth-century artist known for having created a style specific to the Kwakiutl of Fort Rupert. His son-in-law, Mungo Martin, was exceptionally talented and one of the great master sculptors of the Pacific coast. He transmitted his knowledge, technique, and art to his son-in-law, Henry Hunt, and his grandson, Tony. Tony Hunt was also the founder of Arts of the Raven Gallery, an organization devoted to teaching young Aboriginal sculptors. (Ville de Montreal 2022)

Watch this archival video about carvers Mungo Martin and Henry from 1963, a few years before Expo. Please note that it uses terminology of the time, and should be viewed as a document of the 1960s.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-6>

In this more recent video, David Knox and Mervyn Hunt describe the restoration of a pole carved in the 1960s.



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Writing about Norval Morrisseau, art historian Carmen Robertson notes: “In 1967 Indigenous artists were commissioned to create the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67, a moment now considered pivotal in acknowledging activism and awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada. Morrisseau was part of a group called the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc., which was established by Odawa artist Daphne Odjig (1919–2016) in Winnipeg in 1973 and labelled the Indian Group of Seven by the press.” She explains that Morrisseau left the project after his mural design depicting bear cubs nursing from Mother Earth was deemed too controversial by government officials.

Watch Michel Régnier’s National Film Board of Canada documentary, *Indian Memento* (1967), which takes a first-hand look at the Indians of Canada Pavilion:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=136#oembed-8>

To contextualize “Indian Memento,” listen to both parts of “Why the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67 still matters” on the CBC’s podcast, *The Secret Life of Canada*.

Blackfoot artist Gerald Tailfeathers created the exterior mural for the Indians of Canada Pavilion. Tailfeathers’ mural, art practice, and political life in the 1960s have been largely overlooked in Canadian art history.



Figure 7.9 Laurent Bélanger, *Indians of Canada Pavilion*, on Notre-Dame Island. The sculpture is a totem pole, the *Kwakiutl*, work of Henry Hunt and his son Tony. The sculpture was restored by the Hunt family (Stanley Clifford Hunt, Lavina Hunt, Jason Hunt et Curtis Henry Dickie). It stands on Notre-Dame Island near the former Canada Pavilion. Expo 67, Montréal, Québec, Canada, 1967. Photograph. Uploaded by Wikimedia user Laurent Bélanger.

Listen to this archival clip from 1967 from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to learn about the Canadian art featured in the Canadian pavilion at Expo 67 (12 minutes).

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 7.7

What artists were mentioned in “Canadian artists at Expo 67”? Reflect critically on what work in this period was seen as significant to national representation: Which artists were shown? What type of work?

- Samantha Burton on Frances Jones (Bannerman), *In the Conservatory* (1883)
- Magdalena Milosz on Indians of Canada Pavilion (1967)

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# INSTITUTIONS

For more than three months in 2008-09, the imposing neo-classical façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) was transformed by Dzawada'enuxw artist Marianne Nicolson's *The House of the Ghosts*. This site-specific project reimagined the cultural institution through projection. The dramatic lighting foregrounded Kwakwaka'wakw imagery in Vancouver's urban core—a stark contrast to the neoclassical structure imbued with colonial authority. Built in 1906, the building was designed by settler architect Sir Francis Mawson Rattenbury (who also designed the Victoria Legislative Assembly and Empress Hotel in Victoria on Vancouver Island). Initially the site of a provincial courthouse in the 1980s, the building was renovated by architect Arthur Erickson to house the VAG, which relocated there in 1983. This change was part of a larger urban development project in Robson Square in the period. Therefore the VAG occupies a building that references layers of history and institutions connected to colonial government, authority and power. The building's links to such authority endure today; it is currently owned by the provincial government and subleased through the City of Vancouver.

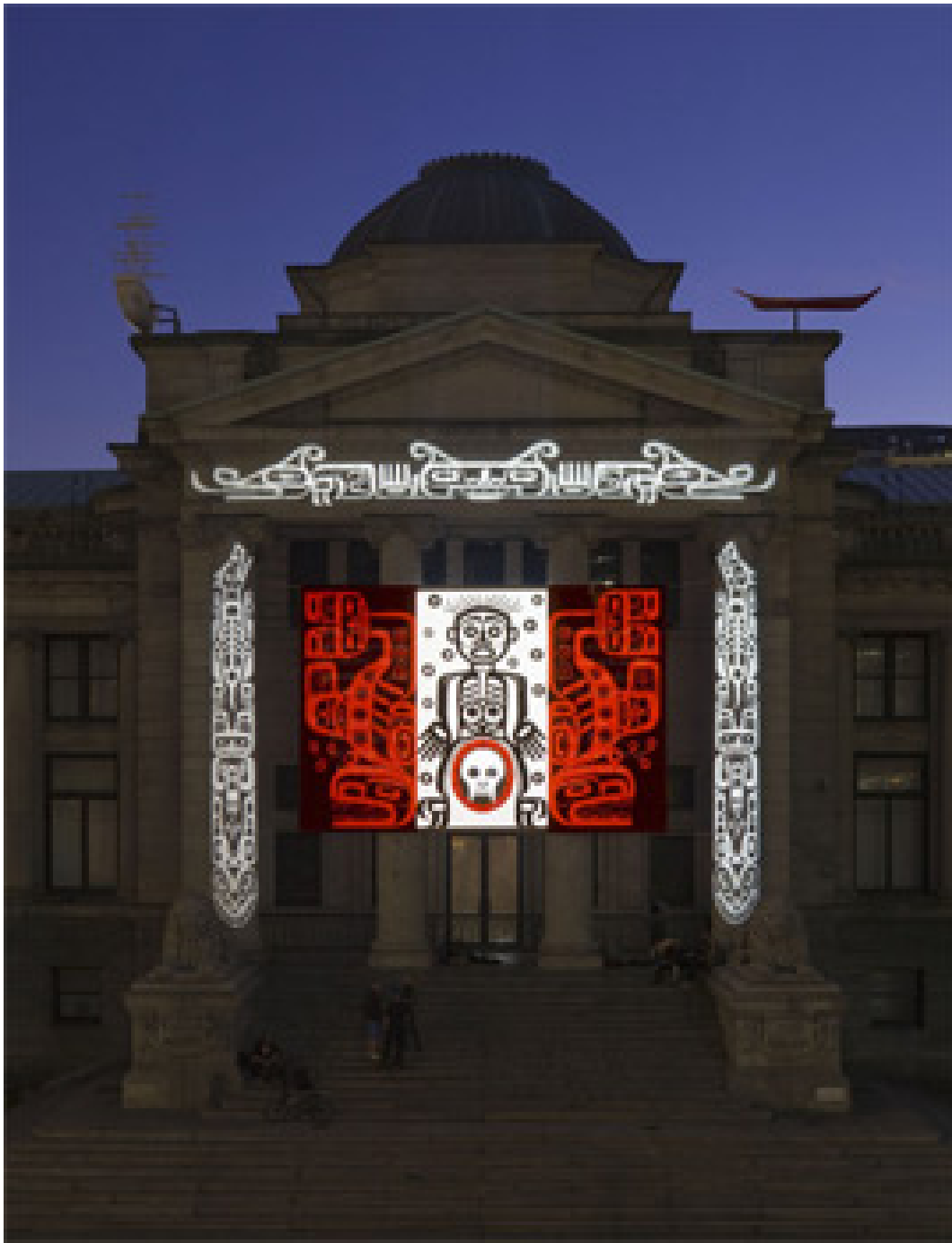


Figure 8.1 Marianne Nicolson, *The House of the Ghosts*, 2008-9. Multimedia.

Bearing a resemblance to the Canadian flag, Nicolson's projection stretched across the façade of the VAG, illuminating an area more than ten metres wide. The light transformed the colonial institution of the courthouse—representing the rule of law and colonial power—into a distinctly Indigenous space, specifically a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial Big House. The alignment of the projection transforms the building's pillars so that it appears as the post-and-lintel architecture of a Big House. The design of the projected façade features stylized orcas, wolves, owls, and a ghost puppet (a reference to the artist's paintings), rendered in white, red, and black. Nicolson employs the contemporary media of digital projection, but maintains the formal aesthetic language of the Northwest coast's Indigenous people.



This artistic intervention directly onto the museum temporarily transformed the structure, challenging its meaning. The artist's work "symbolizes the survival of Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations cultures and communities, despite active efforts to suppress and eradicate them" (e-flux 2022). Nicolson's *The House of Ghosts* is a challenge to the structure and purpose of the museum, bringing to mind the complex histories of power and cultural institutions. The projection draws attention to the ways in which objects in the museum are categorized as art, despite their use/positioning otherwise before arriving at the institution. Nicolson's work also points to the wealth that is housed in museums, which are significant storehouses for cultural objects, often at great remove from their communities of origin.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 8.1

Have you been to a museum recently? Did you ever wonder how the objects got there? Or have you ever recognized something from your own culture in a museum? Were you surprised by how your culture was presented? Can you think of a time when you were surprised by how a culture different from your own was represented in a museum?

### By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- describe how institutions enact authority as arbiters of cultural significance, custodians of prized objects, and narrators of histories, communities, and identities
- analyze the historic trajectory of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, including the development of its physical site, collections, and organization
- discuss artists working within institutions to critique and make prominent their naturalized ways of displaying and conceiving of objects
- explain various types of art institutions (including national galleries, encyclopedic museums, micromuseums, and artist-run centres).

### It will take you:

***The House of the Ghosts*** Text 10 min

**Outcomes and contents** Text 5 min

**Institutional authority** Video 9 min, Text 28 min

**A museum in the city: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts** Video 5 min, 52 min

**Museum interventions** Podcast 19 min, Video 4 min, Video 7 min, 12 min, 8 min

**Institutional case studies** Video 20 min, Video 2 min

**Learning journals** 7 x 20 min

**Total: approximately 5.25 hours**

## Key works:

- Fig. 8.1 Marianne Nicolson, *The House of the Ghosts* (2008-9)
- Fig. 8.2 William Notman & Son, Art Association building, Phillips' Square, Montreal, QC, about 1890
- Fig. 8.3 William Brymner, *Old Man Painting in the Louvre, Paris*, (1880/81 and 1902/3)
- Moshe Safdie, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
- Luc Bourdon, *A Museum in the City* (2011)
- Kent Monkman, *Another Feather in Her Bonnet* (2017)
- Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989)
- Fig. 8.4 James Luna, *Artifact Piece* (1987)
- Fig. 8.5 Rebecca Belmore, *Mister Luna* (2001) Agnes Etherington Art Centre
- Fig. 8.6 Spring Hurlbut, *The Final Sleep, swans, study skins* (2001)
- Fig. 8.7 D'Arcy Wilson, *Nest* from "The Memorialist, Museology Series" (2016)
- Brendan Fernandes, *Authority Inside* (2016)
- Moshe Safdie, National Gallery of Canada (1988)
- The World Famous Gopher Hole Museum in Torrington
- Fig. 8.8 Article
- Fig. 8.9 General Idea, Art Metropole, 241 Yonge Street, Toronto (1974)

## Institutional authority

"Museums can make it hard to see." –Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing" (1991)

Museums have long been considered powerful agents: arbiters of cultural significance, custodians of prized objects, and narrators of histories, communities, and identities. They advance hegemonic values through the stories and objects they display, and also implicitly relegate others to the sidelines by marginalizing or excluding certain narratives and items. Their role is significant, given their public orientation. They sit at the intersection between the state and civil society and function as educational institutions, facilitating research as well as public learning.

Museums themselves have a history to tell; they are more than containers of things. They are complex reflections of the cultures that produce them, and include and reinforce these cultures' politics, social structures, and systems of thought. Our understanding of museums really starts in the 17th or 18th century, but earlier collections of objects and sites of display influenced the museum's formation.

Read Dr. Elizabeth Rodini's essay "A Brief History of the Art Museum" for more background context on the advent and development of the art museum.

The advent of critical museology or museum studies (the examination of the history of museums, their role in society, and operational aspects like curating, preservation, public programming, and education) in the late 20th century was tied to shifts in other academic disciplines like anthropology, sociology, art history, and cultural studies, to name a few. From the 1980s and 1990s onward, scholars began to challenge the supposed neutrality of the museum, producing a large body of scholarship on institutional critique that addresses how museums advance taste and class distinctions (Bourdieu 1984), serve as sites for social performance (Bennett 1995) and the construction of social values (Luke 2002), promote nationalism (Anderson 2006; Duncan and

Wallach 1980; Wallis 1994), advance western understandings of culture and ownership (Clifford 1988), and reinforce colonialism by structuring encounters with non-western cultures (Clifford 1997, Phillips 2011).

Scholars Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach (1980) have identified what they see as some of the underlying ideological objectives of universal survey museums, such as the Louvre. They suggest that the institutional mandate of such museums is tied to the projection of national identity and state power. Benedict Anderson (2006, 163) similarly identifies the significance of “institutions of power,” pointing to the museum as a key site for the production of nationalism. Anderson describes how institutions work to subsume everything to the nation and to render it visible to members of the community (184). The nation feeds on national narratives generated through cultural products. Duncan and Wallach explain how cultural goods fill this void through their symbolism. “Because the state is abstract and anonymous,” they argue, “it is especially in need of potent and tangible symbols of its powers and attributes” (Duncan and Wallach 1980, 457). Thus, the museum, through its architecture and its carefully curated arrangements of art, artifacts, and information, presents narratives that render visible the nation’s values. As Brian Wallis (1994) notes, these curatorial narratives often conceal omissions and mistruths.

Watch the Art Assignment video, “The Case for Museums,” here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=138#oembed-1>

## LEARNING JOURNAL 8.2

Think about a museum in your region, or one you have visited previously—does this institution fit the model explained in the video? Does it raise any of the same questions or concerns seen in the video?

In *Civilizing Rituals*, Carol Duncan passionately argues for the critical role museums play:

*To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual—those who are most able to respond to its various cues—are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms. It is precisely for this reason that museums and museum practices can become objects of fierce struggle and impassioned debate. What we see and do not see in art museums—and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it—is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity (Duncan, 8-9).*

Similarly, in “The Art Museum as Ritual,” (1995) Duncan writes, “museums offer well-developed ritual scenarios, most often in the form of art historical narratives that unfold through a sequence of spaces. Even when visitors enter museums to see only selected works, the museum’s larger narrative structure stands as a frame and gives meaning to individual works” (12). She indicates that museums can become the focus “of fierce struggle and impassioned debate” (8) because they often reinforce the values of particular identities and communities.

## A museum in the city: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

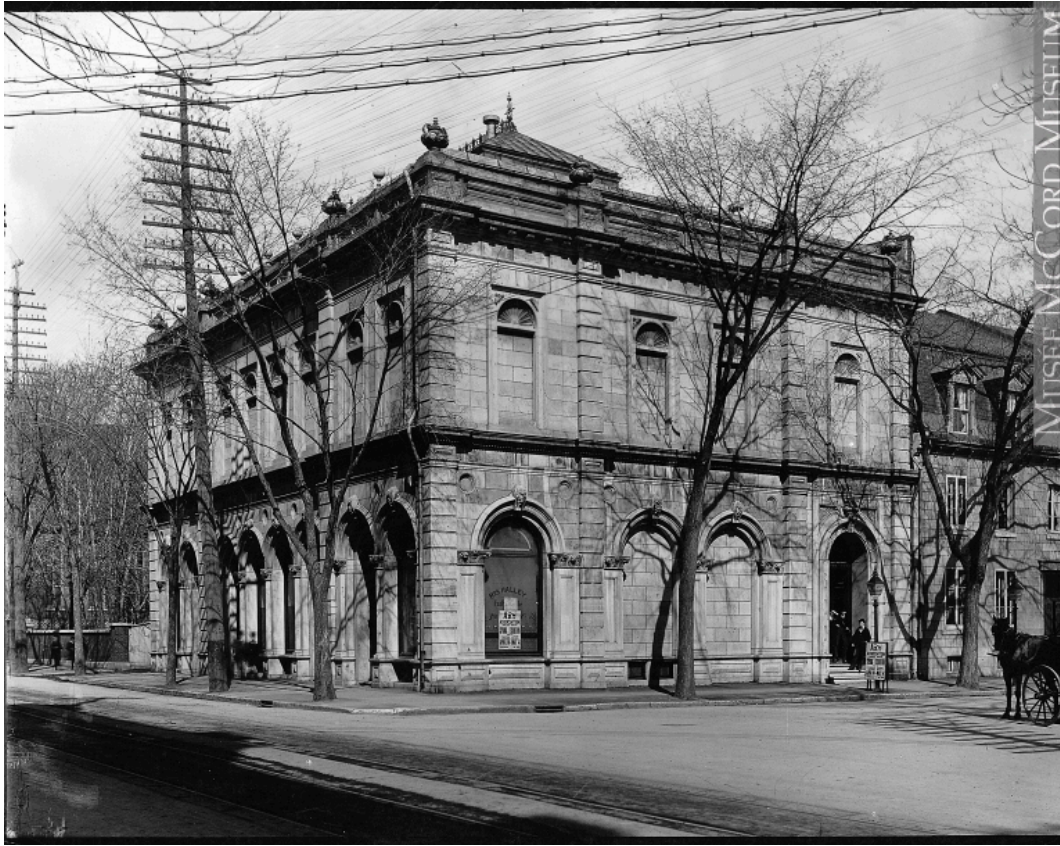


Figure 8.2 William. Notman and Son, Art Association building, Phillips' Square, Montreal, QC, about 1890. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper – Albumen process, 20 x 25 cm. McCord Museum, Montreal.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is one of the most visited and largest art museums in Canada. Located in Canada's leading cultural capital, Montreal—a city imbricated in the cosmopolitan networks of high culture—the MMFA is a key institution in the “golden triangle” cultural region encompassing Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto.

The MMFA was founded in 1860 as the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) by a small group of collectors and educators with the intent of giving fine arts a greater presence in the emerging city. Although it struggled initially to find community support and a permanent building, a bequest by wealthy merchant and collector Benaiah Gibb in 1877 financed the purchase of land and the construction of the building in downtown Phillips Square. In 1886 landscape painter and associate of the Royal Canadian Academy, William Brymner, was appointed director of the AAM's school of art.



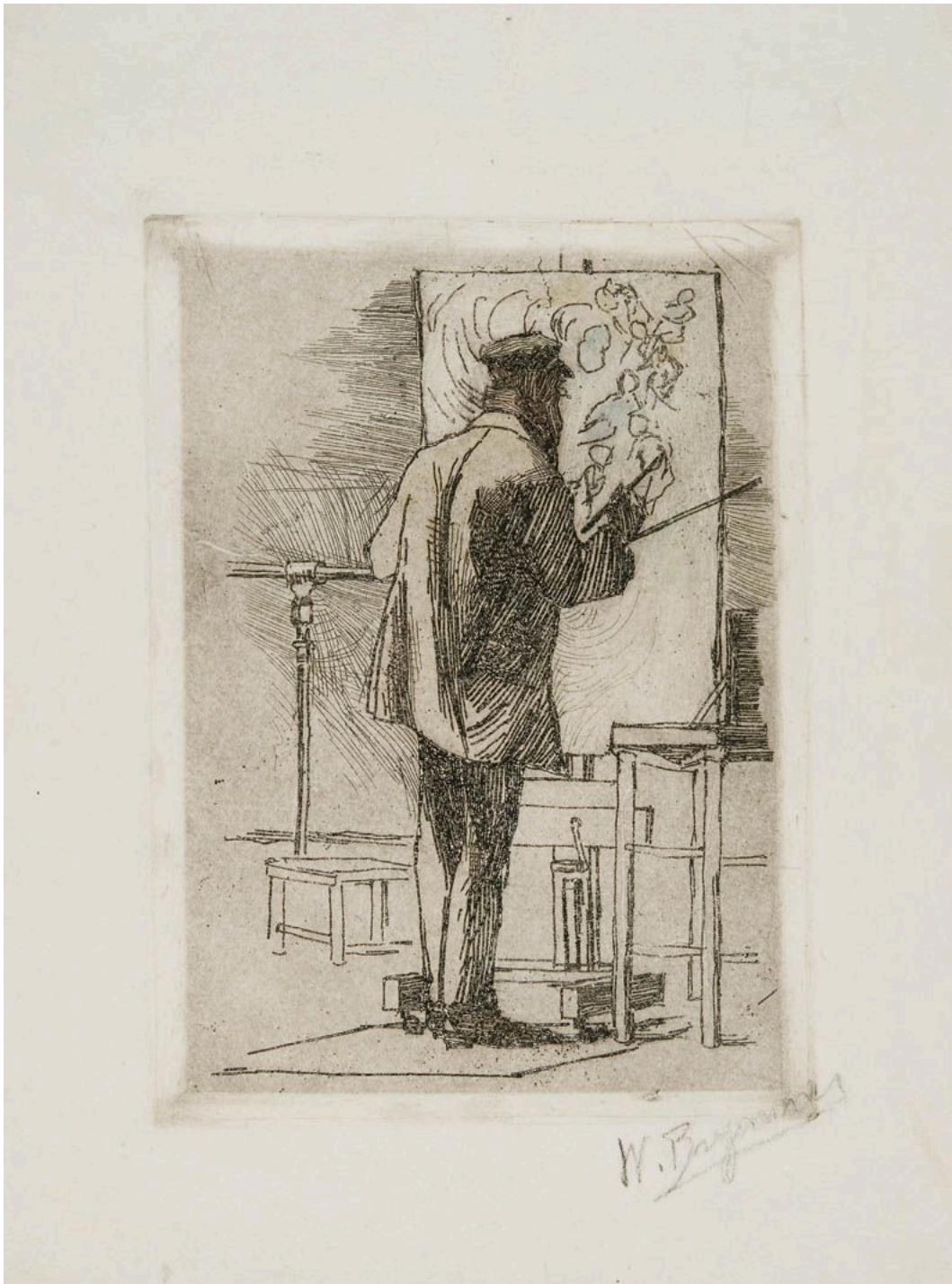


Figure 8.3 William Brymner, *Old Man Painting in the Louvre, Paris, 1880-1*. Etching, aquatint, watercolour highlights, 19.9 x 14.9 cm (sheet), 13.6 x 10 cm (platemark). The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. Photo MBAM, Jean-François Brière.

Read more about William Brymner's influence on Canadian art while teaching at the AAM in Jocelyn Anderson's Art Canada Institute Biography of Brymner which outlines his "Legacy as a Teacher." She notes:

“Brymner’s approach to teaching was striking: it was defined by his strong commitment to the French academic tradition, but he also encouraged students to develop their own styles. A consideration of Brymner’s career is incomplete without a discussion of his achievements as an instructor at the Art Association of Montreal” (ACI, 2020).

Art historian Anne Whitelaw outlines the MMFAs development in the 20th century:

*The AAM became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1949 and, in recognition of the importance of francophone culture in the city the moniker Musée des beaux-arts de Montreal was added in 1969. Despite some difficult times the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) was long the centre for artistic activity in English-speaking Montreal. Art classes were formalized in the 1880s under the directorship of William Brymner (1855-1925) and were significantly expanded under Edwin Holgate (1892-1977) and Lilius Torrance Newton (1896-1980) in the 1930s and 1940s and then under Arthur Lismer (1885-1969), beginning in 1947. For much of its history the Museum also held regular exhibitions of works on loan from local collectors, presented an annual Spring Exhibition of works by Canadian artists, and alternated with the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and the National Gallery in hosting the Royal Canadian Academy annual exhibitions. In addition, private donations and carefully cultivated relationships with major collectors enable the MMFA to build a considerable permanent collection ranging in scope from objects from ancient Greece, to European paintings and sculpture, Canadian and Quebecois art, and the decorative arts (2010, 5).*

### LEARNING JOURNAL 8.3

Watch the creative documentary *A Museum in the City* (52 minutes) by Luc Bourdon (2011) and consider the MMFA in relation to Carol Duncan’s arguments about the museum as ritual. What are the rituals of the museum? Who participates in these rituals? Who does not? How does the ritual of the museum entrench certain narratives? And what are these narratives?

The museum continues to expand and in 2019 it opened the Stéphan Crétier and Stéphanie Maillory Wing for the Arts of One World, a space that “promotes inclusive values that reflect Montreal, a metropolis made up of close to 120 cultural communities,” that “invites people of different cultures to come together to better understand one another at a time, in this 21st century, when togetherness has become an issue of vital importance” (MMFA, “Arts of One World,” 2022). Of late, the MMFA has made a name for itself with exhibitions of work by fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier (2017) and Thierry Mugler (2019).

Kent Monkman, an interdisciplinary Cree artist, created a performance that was showcased as part of the Gaultier show in 2017. This work, entitled *Another Feather in Her Bonnet*, featured Monkman’s performance alter-ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Watch the performance here:





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=138#oembed-2>

According to the MMFA:

*For the faux ceremony, Miss Chief wears a white feather headdress created by Gaultier for the wedding gown of the 2002-2003 fall-winter haute couture collection The Hussars. Inspired by headdresses of Indigenous peoples of the Plains, this headdress was originally displayed in the exhibition Love Is Love: Wedding Bliss for All à la Jean Paul Gaultier. In the context of the debate over cultural appropriation, the presence of this headdress in the exhibition demanded a response, so the MMFA invited Monkman to create an artistic commentary. His reply: Miss Chief would gracefully accept Jean Paul Gaultier's hand in marriage. With his long-time collaborator Gisèle Gordon, Monkman designed this performance to be a symbolic union that represents two artists coming together to challenge ideas of cultural appropriation and build an artistic union based on mutual affection and greater cultural understanding.*

*"Through the alliance of marriage, we learn to understand and forgive the mistakes of our partners and to build true understanding. Marriage encourages and nurtures new life, new experiences. Today, Miss Chief accepts Jean Paul Gaultier's proposal of artistic union as an aesthetic alliance leading to mutual respect and cultural understanding," said Kent Monkman.*

*Indigenous headdresses are imbued with spiritual significance. An earned honour, they come with protocols and responsibilities. Monkman's artistic claiming of this faux headdress speaks to the broader stereotype of the Indigenous woman as perceived by the colonial gaze. Through Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Monkman evokes the gender-fluid and/or two-spirit people venerated and accepted by most pre-contact Indigenous nations, whose cross-dressing ways scandalized and were suppressed by European colonists.*

*As an accompaniment to the performance, Monkman collaborated with Toronto photographer Chris Chapman to create wedding-portrait style photographic art pieces of Miss Chief and Jean Paul Gaultier, adopting the style and presentation of the 19th century French cabinet card format (MMFA, "Kent Monkman's..." 2019).*

The figure of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle is employed in a number of ways through Monkman's art practice, not limited to performance work. Chief curator and director of programming at the Art Gallery of Hamilton Shirley Madill explains:

*Miss Chief's name is a play on the words "mischief" and "egotistical," and in its early use also incorporated "Cher" as a way to perform a reimagining of the 1970s pop diva (Katz 2012, 19). Today, she is known as Monkman's alter ego, living and taking part in art history. In the tradition of Indigenous storytelling, she embodies the mythological trickster and takes the form of a two-spirit, third gender, supernatural character who exhibits a great degree of intellect and knowledge when she is present in a work of art. Monkman uses her to help guide viewers to see new truths. Glamorous, flamboyant, confident, and always high-heeled, she inhabits paintings and appears in installations, performances, and videos. Since her first manifestation nearly twenty years ago, she's played a central role in correcting accounts of Indigenous histories. Indeed, Miss Chief is the key to much of the artist's work (Madill, ACI).*



Explore some of the artworks depicted in Shirley Madill's essay on Miss Chief to see the different ways that Kent Monkman utilizes his alter ego in his artistic practice. For example, look at: *Being Legendary* (2018); *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter* (2002); *The Triumph of Mischief* (2007); and *Woe to Those Who Remember from Whence They Came* (2008).

Select a work by Monkman and think about how it functions. In 5 to 10 sentences, describe and explain the medium, what is represented, how Miss Chief is used by the artist, and what message the work conveys to viewers.

For Monkman, Miss Chief is a means to comment on the long histories of Indigenous-settler relations: "I wanted a persona to really reflect our point of view at the time that colonial policies were beginning." Listen to Monkman discuss his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle here: <https://soundcloud.com/metmuseum/kent-monkman-on-mistikosiwak-wooden-boat-people>

Monkman's work at the MMFA—and in other cultural institutions—is just one of many ways that artists have engaged in institutional critique. Other artists, such as Andrea Fraser, also employ performance personas to unsettle institutions and point to how they structure our ways of seeing and valuing culture. For instance, consider Fraser's work *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* from 1989, which takes the form of a gallery tour by Fraser's persona of gallery docent Jane Castleton. As Fraser explains: "Jane Castleton is neither a character nor an individual. She is an object, a site determined by a function. As a docent, she is the museum's representative, and her function is, quite simply, to tell visitors what the museum wants—that is, to tell them" (Martin 2014).

More broadly, institutional critique can be advanced by artists working beyond performance. Institutional critique is a broad form of art production that art historian Benjamin Buchloh dates to 1960s conceptual art. Buchloh notes the necessity of artist's institutional critique, given that institutions validate cultural production and that "[t]hese institutions, which determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimization" (Smith 2021, 143).

## Museum interventions

In addition to the scholarship in critical museum studies, artists have also drawn attention to the ways in which museums advance agendas through specific institutional practices. The exhibition as a display mechanism has been a key site for critique. In the 1992 exhibition, *Mining the Museum*, Fred Wilson reworked the displays at the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) in Baltimore to reintroduce previously marginalized narratives about Black and Indigenous histories, revealing the elitism of the museum's standard exhibition narratives within museums. As Kerr Houston writes, "Working with objects in the collection of the MHS, Wilson unsettled the museum's comfortably white, upper-class narrative by juxtaposing silver repoussé vessels and elegant 19th-

century armchairs with slave shackles and a whipping post. Texts, spotlights, recorded texts, and objects traditionally consigned to storage drew attention to the local histories of blacks and Native Americans, effectively unmaking the familiar museological narrative as a narrow ideological project" (Kerr, 2017). Prior to Wilson's exhibition, in 1987 performance artist James Luna unsettled normative ways of seeing in the museum through *Artifact Piece*. In this work, Luna placed his body inside a vitrine in the San Diego Museum of Man to prompt visitors to rethink how Indigenous peoples and cultures had been positioned in a critique of display culture.



Figure 8.4 James Luna, *Artifact Piece*, 1987. Performance. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

Art historian Richard William Hill has reflected on *Artifact Piece* as a breakthrough: "It was one of those works that manages to concentrate many important, emergent ideas into a single gesture at just the right moment – in this case the moment when many Indigenous people were struggling urgently to theorize and express their concerns about their representations in museums" (2018).

Luna's work went on to influence other artists. In 2001, Rebecca Belmore paid tribute to him with *Mister Luna*, a playful installation. Now in the collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Belmore's homage of "shiny yellow shoes bask in a halo of vanity lights: the moon-like configuration of lights conspires with the radiance and colour of the piece to generate a visual pun on the subject artist's name. Mister Luna mingles comic staging and respect in its suggestion that, as an astute and influential articulator of the cultural perspective of aboriginal peoples, James Luna offers illumination and inspiration to all" (Agnes Etherington 2022).

[VIEW REBECCA BELMORE'S MISTER LUNA HERE](#)

Figure 8.5 Rebecca Belmore, *Mister Luna* (2001). Painted leather shoes, vanity lights, feathers, electrical cords and hardware, 228.6 x 152.4 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Centre.

According to Linda Steer, museums today are engaging more and more with artists, which perhaps helps to widen the scope of their vision. This is just one way that we might rethink the histories of collections and collecting from other points of view. Listen to Steer discuss this in her podcast *Unboxing the Canon* in Episode 7: “Musing on Museums” (19 minutes).

One of the artists featured in Steer’s “Musing on Museums” episode is Spring Hurlbut, winner of the 2018 Governor General Arts Award. The same year that Belmore paid homage to James Luna, Hurlbut created the exhibition *The Final Sleep* by reconfiguring and displaying 400 objects from the Royal Ontario Museum’s (ROM) collection. Steer notes, “Everything in the exhibition was white, and objects were classified and arranged according to the artist’s logic, not scientific logic or museum logic. She took many skeletons and taxidermied animals from the natural history branch of the museum and arranged them in rows. They were not installed in dioramas, which is the usual way we encounter animal bodies in museums. And the objects weren’t arranged according to a presupposed hierarchy. They were arranged according to the artist’s aesthetic vision.”



Figure 8.6 Spring Hurlbut, *The Final Sleep*, swans, study skins (2001). Swans, study skins, 371 square meter. Installation at the Royal Ontario Museum.

When asked if the curatorial intervention was “intended to be an institutional critique, a rumination on life and death, or both” the artist explained, “The rumination on life and death is completely accurate. While the ROM acknowledges their specimens’ scientific usefulness, their humble deaths go unrecognized. The ROM was grateful that *The Final Sleep* bridged that gap, and the public was enthralled by the rarely seen study collection. It is a dream of mine to make a permanent installation in a natural history museum” (Clarke 2010).

Watch this excerpt from the film *Spring & Arnaud* which follows Hurlbut as she recounts the creation of her 2001 installation *The Final Sleep* at the Royal Ontario Museum (4 minutes).

Established by the ROM Act in 1912, and opened in 1914, The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto is one of

the largest museums in North America. In contrast to the MMFA's focus on art, the ROM is an encyclopedic collection of more than six million items of global material culture and natural history. The five original galleries were divided among the fields of archaeology, geology, mineralogy, paleontology, and zoology, but have been reorganized into two main galleries of natural history and world culture, which in turn are divided into individual galleries named after significant donors. In 2007, the ROM opened the controversial Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, a Deconstructivist crystalline-form expansion designed by Daniel Libeskind.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 8.5

For more on the ROM, watch this video on the history of the institution (7 minutes). Consider how it is similar to the MMFA. How is it different? What are the controversies the video raises? Answer some of the questions posed. Should objects acquired in non-consensual ways be given back to the communities they were taken from?

D'Arcy Wilson is another contemporary artist who, like Hurlbut, engages with the genealogy of natural history collections and the specimens they contain. Nominated for a Sobey Award in 2019, Wilson's interdisciplinary art-making practice interrogates past and ongoing colonial interactions with the natural world. Her series *The Memorialist: Museology* (2015-17) included a work titled *Nest*, which featured a stuffed flamingo that had been "displaced" from a different collection in storage. In 1977 the tropical bird blew off course and was shot down by a Newfoundland fisherman; its body was donated to The Rooms in Newfoundland. Displayed for the first time at the entrance of the exhibition *In Some Far Place*, the found object was accompanied by a performance during the opening reception, in which Wilson and visitors composed a lullaby for the bird and sang it as "they attempted to lull the flamingo to sleep with awkward song" (Wilson 2022).

[VIEW D'ARCY WILSON'S NEST HERE](#)

*Figure 8.7 D'Arcy Wilson, Nest (2011). Collage: gouache, coloured paper and pencil, gold leaf, etching, and c-print on paper. The Rooms.*

In contrast to the MMFA or the ROM, The Rooms is a relatively new cultural institution. Opened in 2005, the multipurpose facility houses the Art Gallery, the Provincial Archives, and the Provincial Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador. Both the building's name and its stunning architecture overlooking the port of St. John's, reference the gable-roofed sheds, or fishing rooms, common in east coast villages.

Inspired by the 70th anniversary of Newfoundland and Labrador's Confederation with Canada, in 2018 and 2019 The Room's two-part exhibition *Future Possible* gathered artworks and artifacts from its collections and displayed them alongside newly commissioned works. Mireille Eagan, Curator of Contemporary Art, explained that the shows "were commentary in cultural objects – statements, questions and reflections about who we are, expressed through art."

She continues:

*Both Future Possible exhibitions explored the province's cultural history through archival material, artworks and artifacts. Each object on display was thus an opportunity for viewers to discern stories that existed within the provincial psyche. The exhibitions asked whether revered notions of place — markers that some say identify us as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians — could, or should, be reconsidered. The gallery space also became an exercise in citation: it assembled well-known examples of the province's culture so that viewers could search for a decipherable taxonomy, a cultural language that informs the province's identity.*

The Future Possible exhibitions were conceived as a way to provide a space to build a history collaboratively through discourse and disagreement. The shows became places and opportunities for artists and viewers to take responsibility for their understanding of this province's history by actively engaging with its narratives. Throughout the gallery, quotes about the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador were displayed, ready to be dissected for their relevance. Divorced from their original context and sitting alongside some of the artworks they referred to, these words became catalysts for comparison and thought. Viewers could also consider their own biases toward the ideas and works on display.

An entire section in the 2018 Future Possible exhibition for example was dedicated to an encyclopedia entry written in 1949 by the then-editor of Canadian Art magazine, Robert Ayre. He described the art history of "Newfoundland" as being left to "outsiders and amateurs." His opinion was, and still is, a common bias about pre-Confederation art made here. Juxtaposing his words with artwork and objects created prior to Confederation revealed just how firmly Ayre's statement was rooted in Eurocentric notions of art — in which trained artists work in traditional fine-art media such as painting and sculpture. The setting also illustrated how that view negated a long and varied history of craft and Indigenous creative production, not to mention the entire art history of Labrador. (Egan 2021, 14-16)

Egan's observation about writing a history of visual culture in Newfoundland and Labrador echoes the approach of *CandARThistories*, as it is:

...an exercise in constantly amending the ideas and narratives that have been created and left for us. After all, the province is constantly changing — enriched with the arrival of waves of New Canadians, and by the greater attention being paid to Indigenous histories, to those who are differently abled, to the histories of women, to craft-based evolutions and to the emergence of a queer-based aesthetic that is a complex reconsideration of labels. Within such developments, institutions such as The Rooms can act as a pivot, a site for discourse. Here we can explore diverse histories, reflect on the institutional shift from objective expertise to offering a place where different perspectives can be brought together, whether they be gestures of care and support or acts of protest (21).

Watch Brendan Fernandes' performance *Authority Inside* (2016) [here](#).

*Authority Inside* was part of the 2016 exhibition *Lost Bodies*, a show curated by Sunny Kerr of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre. The show was conceived as an engagement with the Agnes' Lang Collection of works by West and Central African people, including objects from 19 African countries, representing approximately 80 cultural groups. Fernandes' *Authority Inside* is a demonstration of how contemporary artists can critically engage with institutions and their collections. This 2016 choreographed video performance depicts an area off-limits to visitors: the vault of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. The video of this subterranean space opens with the movement of the mobile shelves of the vault, which roll away, apparently of their own volition, to reveal aisles and drawers filled with sculptures. The implication is that the vault is an archive, encyclopedic in scope. Dimly lit, the video conveys an ominous tone, augmenting the viewer's sense of unease underscored by the slowly-building instrumental music and the jerky movements of the handheld camera. The camera pans the metal shelves of the vault holding the Justin and Elisabeth Lang Collection of African Art, which contains more than 570 sculptures from the 19th and early 20th centuries. As sculptures and masks come in and out of focus, the camera's movements convey the actions of the off-screen ballet dancer, whose dance on pointe through the vault directs the camera lens. The contrast between the static objects and the animated motion of the dancer is stark. As Fernandes explains, the video

alludes to “[the] ambiguous relationship between the body and the archive [and] suggests the equally complex relationship between the African art objects stored in the vault and the African bodies which once danced with them” (Fernandes). Fernandes’ “disembodied animation” of the archive emphasizes the “motionlessness” of the collection. This absence of motion brings to mind the original dances that at one time animated these objects. Moreover, Fernandes points to the history of the Agnes’ collection, specifically drawing attention to the Lang Collection which has not been fully used or displayed as a museum resource due to various factors, including lack of funding.

As the video pans across objects from the collection, viewers might consider how these sculptures came to be located in Kingston. In fact, the Lang Collection entered into the Agnes’ permanent holdings in 1982 as a gift from Justin and Elisabeth Lang of Montreal. At the time of its donation, it was considered the largest Canadian collection of African art in private hands. The Langs were a part of an influential group of patrons whose tastes shaped the definitions and display of historic African art in Canada through the donation of their collections to major art institutions across the country. The Langs acquired sculptures over a period of 40 years, beginning around 1938 and expanding their collection until 1980. The bulk of the collection was acquired through the secondary market, with the Langs making their first trip to the African continent only in 1970. *Authority Inside* allows viewers to conceive of the Lang Collection in its entirety. Yet the video survey of the vault makes clear the serial nature of the collection, which is distinguished by subtle variations of sculptural forms. The exclusions usually elided in museum displays—which as Francis Haskell notes present themselves as complete narratives and conceal their own construction—are thus made clear to the audience: the collection is not comprehensive. As curator Catherine Hale argues: “[The Lang Collection] . . . reflects the tastes of a particular pair of collectors who developed out of a specific set of social and historical circumstances” (2006, 8). Her research reveals that: “[the collection is very much] a product of the Modernist Primitive ‘taste culture’ that formed during the mid-twentieth century in Canada,” which valued the formal qualities of African visual and material culture (8). “Normalized within the canon of Art History,” this approach emerged out of the European fascination with the so-called Primitive Arts and the anti-modern sentiment of the period (6).

For the exhibition *Lost Bodies*, Fernandes engaged with two key Canadian collections of historic African visual and material culture: The Justin and Elisabeth Lang Collection of African Art at the Agnes and the collection of the Textile Museum of Canada (TMC). Digital collages are displayed alongside a selection of four textiles from the TMCs permanent collection, and other works are placed in proximity to a selection of objects from the Agnes’ Lang Collection. Several of Fernandes’ pieces also reference African art objects from a third historic African collection: the Seattle Art Museum. Fernandes plays with the conventions of museum exhibition display, adding pencil drawings to the plinths used throughout the exhibition, with markings that reference the patterns of the TMC textiles. *Lost Bodies* critically considers the histories of these three separate institutions and re-presents their African holdings in a soft intervention. Presenting Fernandes’ contemporary works in response to these collections, alongside a selection of objects from the Canadian collections themselves, *Lost Bodies* urges visitors to consider the role of collections of African art in North American institutions, and the categories assigned to the objects they hold. Asking visitors to critically assess how they interact with such collections, curator Sunny Kerr frames the exhibition with pointed questions about the display of non-Western art in Western museums: “What does it mean to circle an Igbo elephant mask [in a vitrine] or peer at a Faluni blanket [on the wall] in a Western art museum? ... [and] With what fantasies do you receive them?”

The artworks animate and reflect on historic collections to reveal new ways of thinking about the histories of cultural producers, fine art collections and collectors, and Western museum spaces, while posing larger questions about decolonization. As such, Fernandes’ work offers a way of further examining African collections in Canadian museums. This project is necessary, given the lack of information given about these materials and the endurance of a Primitivist ideology that shapes their display in these institutions. For instance, Hale argues: “lack of scholarship and expertise has meant that much information about Canadian collections of African art remains unknown” (2006, 2). This cannot be a task solely assigned to art historians and curators. Contemporary artists, working alongside institutions, can contribute significantly to knowledge production

around these collections due to the public accessibility of their artwork. The importance of this endeavour should not be understated, especially given the contentious history of exhibiting African visual and material culture in Canada; the most infamous example being the 1989 exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Many contemporary artists like Fernandes work in partnership with museums while still critically reflecting on museums' role in society and the contentious histories of the collections they contain. Through re-presentation, appropriation, performance and choreography, the sculptures, textiles and contemporary artworks in *Lost Bodies* point to the particular constraints of Western museums: namely, their focus on the formal qualities of the object and the absence of information about the cultural producers who created these works and who used them in their daily lives.

Learn about another artist-museum intervention at the Victoria and Albert Museum in the United Kingdom by watching *Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities* (8 minutes).

## Institutional case studies

### LEARNING JOURNAL 8.6

Read *What Is a Museum? A Dispute Erupts Over a New Definition*. Can you write your own definition of a museum? Write a paragraph or two describing what a museum is to you.

Watch this Virtual Walking Tour of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=138#oembed-3>

According to Canada's Museum Act, the purpose of the National Gallery of Canada is "to develop, maintain, and make known, throughout Canada and internationally, a collection of works of art, both historic and contemporary, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, and to further knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of art in general among all Canadians" (Government of Canada). Founded in 1880, alongside the RCA, with the support of Canada's fourth Governor General the Marquis of Lorne, the history of the NGC is similar to the founding of many other art institutions across Canada. Art historian Anne Whitelaw explains:

*Despite being founded in 1880, it was officially incorporated only in 1913 by an act of Parliament. Its first director was Eric Brown, an English art critic who was hired by Sir Edmund Walker, a financier and chairman of the National Gallery's governing board of trustees, to head up the fledgling institution.*



*Despite federal support the National Gallery would be inadequately housed and funded for many of its early years. Originally located in a Department of Public Works building that was also home to the Department of Fisheries, it moved in 1911 to the Victoria Museum building (now the Canadian Museum of Nature), which it shared with the Museum Branch of the Geological Survey of Canada (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization). For many artists, the idea that works of art would be competing for space with dinosaur bones and other natural specimens was inconceivable, and there was much criticism of the status being accorded Canadian art by the federal government. The Victoria Museum would nevertheless remain the home of the National Gallery for many years, until the NGC's move to yet more temporary quarters in 1960. The Lorne Building, a newly constructed office building that was retrofitted to house the National Gallery, was supposed to accommodate the institution only until funding was found to erect a purpose-built home; but it was not until 1988 that the current building designed by Moshe Safdie (b. 1938) opened in its location on Nepean Point across from the parliament buildings (Whitelaw 2010, 4).*

Like the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the NGC was designed by Moshe Safdie. See him describe the process behind his design here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=138#oembed-4>

The NGC is located on the National Capital Commission's Confederation Boulevard, a 7.5-kilometer ceremonial route linking national sites in Ontario and Quebec. The location is busy, sitting between landmarks and tourist hotspots, including the Peacekeeping Monument, the US Embassy, Major's Hill Park, and the Royal Canadian Mint, and near Parliament Hill, the Byward Market, and the Alexandra Bridge which spans Ontario and Quebec. The gallery exterior is complemented by a Taiga Garden created by landscape designer Cornelia Hahn Oberlander. Ian Ferguson describes Oberlander's design:

*Oberlander's inspiration for the Taiga Garden came from the site itself, Safdie's architecture and the purpose of the new building. She knew that Group of Seven landscapes would feature prominently inside the Gallery and chose as a reference A.Y. Jackson's *Terre Sauvage* (1913), an early and influential painting of a rocky landscape with Black Spruce. Working with landscape architect and scholar Friedrich Oehmichen of the Université de Montréal, Oberlander selected species that would encourage up-close observation (2021).*

In her commentary on the NGC, Anne Whitelaw underscores the importance of the NGC to the production of Canadian nationalism and national culture:

*Culture has long been the pivotal point around which the contestation of national identity has occurred in Canada. Poised between two major political and cultural powers, politicians and members of the cultural elite have attempted since Confederation to stem perceived encroachments on the nation's autonomy by controlling the import of cultural goods, and subsidizing local production. As the legislators see it, a strong centralized support of Canadian culture remains the foremost tool in the construction of a Canadian national identity: a tool which has proven useful historically in bringing together the most remote regions of the Canadian political landscape, but which has also served as an important mechanism in 'acculturating' immigrant cultures and assigning them a place within the Canadian mosaic. National institutions of culture—the National Film Board, the CBC, the National Museums—function in different ways to ascribe a coherence to, as well as to contain, a diverse set of*

*practices and traditions that may be characterized as 'Canadian,' advancing a single unified national culture that would effect a (unified) national identity.*

*Although the repository of high culture, a realm traditionally associated with universal values that transcend national boundaries, the National Gallery of Canada also figures as an important marker of national culture. This importance goes beyond the gallery's legislated status as a national institution, with a mandate from the federal government to promote Canadian identity. The gallery's fostering of national culture is made visible in the exhibition of its permanent collection, and specifically through the display of the work of Canadian artists. It is through this display that a coherent narrative of Canadian art is constructed, a narrative organized around the contributions of Canadian artistic practice to the nation's growing realization of its status as an autonomous state. Inscribed in the display of Canadian art in the National Gallery's permanent collection, then, is Canada's emergent sense of itself as a nation (2007, 175).*

In contrast to large “institutions of power” like the NGC, micromuseums are institutions that are very different from the traditional museum. These institutions tend to be small, independent (meaning they might not receive government funding), informal, and focused on very specific types of objects and artworks.

Read Lianne McTavish's object story on “The World Famous Gopher Hole Museum in Torrington, Alberta.” Consider how her analysis is a form of institutional critique. She explains, “[The Gopher Hole Museum] challenges assumptions about what museums are and should become, while celebrating the knowledge and skills of the local people, especially rural women, who preserve the heritage of their town by reworking the history of early museums in Canada.”

*“No one is more qualified to speak on behalf of artists than artists themselves.” –Jack Chambers (CARFAC 2022)*

An important challenge to the power and authority of the National Gallery of Canada took place in the 1960s. London, Ontario artist Jack Chambers challenged the National Gallery of Canada's stance on artists' fees and copyright. In 1967, the NGC sent a letter to a number of artists who were participating in a major exhibition of Canadian art at the gallery and asked for permission to reproduce their work. The gallery did not offer to pay the artists for the exhibition or the reproductions, but the gallery was planning to sell the reproductions for their own profit. Chambers wrote to the other artists in the show, organizing them to lobby the gallery of change, and called for them to unite and refuse to work for free. Chambers' efforts eventually led to the establishment of the Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC) in 1968, when he and Tony Urquhart, Kim Ondaatje, and other artists collectively demanded the recognition of artists' copyrights. Their establishment of a national body that enforced minimum fee schedules resulted in Canada becoming the first country to pay exhibition fees to artists in 1975.

Another challenge to larger museums and galleries also began in the 1960s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, numerous artist-run centres began to emerge in Canada as a parallel structure to the existing museum system. Initiated and managed by artists—hence the name Artist-run Centre (ARC)—many of these organizations were supported by the Canada Council for the Arts. These not-for-profit spaces offered an alternative to the existing government museums and commercial art venues in Canada.

In her object stories essay, curator Amber Berson outlines the history of artist-run centres in Canada:

*Canadian artist-run centres were set up as a series of parallel galleries in the early 1970s. They were described as parallel to the established exhibition models of commercial galleries. Artist-run centres, as spaces for exhibiting art and culture, are not unique to Canada—Sweden, for example, has a thriving community of similar spaces, perhaps because it too has a national financial support system for artists. However, artist-run*

centres occupy a more significant cultural position and are more numerous in Canada than anywhere else in the world. This is primarily because of the longstanding financial support system and policies in place since the creation of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957.

Scholars identify Intermedia Society, founded in Vancouver in 1967 by Jack Shadbolt and Glenn Lewis as the “first multidisciplinary cooperative to receive funding from the Canada Council for the Arts,” (Bonin 2010, 18) though it self-identified as an artists’ association. Artist AA Bronson identifies A Space, founded in 1971 in Toronto, as the first true artist-run centre. Artist-run centres in Canada have historically been funded by local, provincial and national arts councils. They generally operate with traditional not-for-profit administrative models, meaning a board of directors and employees. Many centres, though not all, have active membership—made up of artists and community members. These members participate in jury processes and other administrative models. Some artist-run centres operate as exhibition venues, production facilities or provide distribution platforms.

In order to qualify for funding and to formally be considered an artist-run centre, centres must follow the not-for-profit arts organization model, must not charge admission fees, must be non-commercial and de-emphasize the selling of work. This model encourages but does not demand the exhibition of experimental artwork. As some of the first spaces to adopt conceptual art, artist-run centres were among the first spaces to be explicitly devoted to “contemporary” art as something distinct from the established canon of “modern” art. That is, artist-run centres emerged in the 60s and 70s as conceptualism, video, and performance were ushering in the contemporary period and were key to this transition in Canada. Artist-run centres offered artists the ability to experiment, without the responsibility of producing work for sale. They attempted to pay artists for their exhibition and allowed artists to network nationally at a time when conceptual performance art was dominating.

Artist-run centres are often described as laboratories or incubators for artists. Beyond this, they are spaces where risk-taking happens. Beyond artists and art work we see these risks manifesting in the day to day administration of art and artist-run centres more generally. Today, administrative models in museums, galleries and the general arts milieu recognize the value of engaging in diversity and inclusion practices beyond tokenistic action, in part because artist-run centres showed it was possible and necessary.



Figure 8.8 article,  
Montreal

To learn more about an artist-run centre in Montreal called articule read Amber Berson's essay [here](#).

AA Bronson, member of the artist group General Idea describes the milieu in which artist-run centres emerged in Canada in a now-seminal essay on the subject, "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centres as Museums for Artists":

*Someone sometime must write a really good history of Canadian art in the Sixties and Seventies. This was a unique period of massive development responding to a unique geographical and political situation. Here in Canada something happened that happened nowhere else. The linear construction of the country, the reliance on media, the lack of Canadian identity, the aggressive cultural domination of American popular media, the lack of any real art market at all, the impossibility of competing internationally with New York's hype system and the machinery of American politics pushing American art down the throats of the entire Western world, the [Marshall] McLuhanistic policy-making of the Canadian government in the mid-to-late Sixties, this constellation of unlikely catalysts crystallized into the post-Capital art scene we experience here in Canada today. One aspect of this system is ANNPAC, the Association of National Non-Profit Artists Centres, a typically limp and bureaucratic title which ignores the erratic and inspired cataclysms which constructed this system, in favour of the elemental description which homogenizes it (1983).*

Bronson was also a key figure in another well-known artist-run centre, Art Metropole in Toronto. Art Metropole was founded by artist group General Idea in 1974, and continues to operate in Toronto to this day. Bronson also noted in his essay on artist-run centres that museums provided inadequate representation of Canadian artists. In the late 1960s and 70s, there were only a small number of isolated commercial galleries in Canada, with scant communication between them, and no art fairs or any other signs of a developed commercial system. Artist-run centres provided a means of artist-led self-determination and were a key source of support for experimental projects such as video works, performance art, and conceptual art, in addition to more conventional art forms.

Intermedia, as Berson notes, is often seen as the first artist-run centre in Canada. Other really notable early artist-run centres in Canada include A Space, founded in 1971 in Toronto; Véhicule, founded in 1972 in Montreal; and Western Front, founded in 1973 in Vancouver. As Shannon Moore notes,

*More than 60 years later, artist-run centres continue to exist in large numbers across the country (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference [ARCA] currently represents more than 180). Unique in their programming and mandates, some of these centres have a general focus, while others support specific regions, mediums and groups – such as performance art, print-making, feminist art, disability arts or Indigenous representation. Most of these non-profit spaces do not sell work and instead pay artists and other contributors for their presentations (NGC 2019).*

[VIEW ART METROPOLE HERE](#)

Figure 8.9 General Idea studio/Art Metropole, 241 Yonge Street, Toronto, 1974 Photograph by General Idea

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 8.7

Have you ever heard the term "parallel gallery"? What about "artist-run centre"? Think about your

local art scene: what artist-run centres exist in your region? You can find a directory of all the ARCs in Canada here. Find an ARC in your area and learn more by visiting in person or checking out their website. During your visit identify the following: 1) When was the centre established? 2) Does it have a particular focus or mandate? 3) And most importantly, what artwork is currently on display?

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Amber Berson on article (1979—)
- Lianne McTavish on The World Famous Gopher Hole Museum, Torrington, Alberta (1996—)
- Magdalena Milosz on J.W. Francis (architect), Indians of Canada Pavilion (1967)
- Hana Nikčević on Rebecca Belmore, *Biinjya'iing Onji (From Inside)* (2017)

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# COLLECTIVITY

## VIEW THE *ACHIEVING A DREAM* TAPESTRY HERE

*Figure 9.1 Oolassie Akulukjuk, Dinah Andersen, Kathy Battye, Anna Etuangat, Leese Kakee, Kawtysie Kakee, Sammy Kudluk, Louie Nigiyok, Mabel Nigiyok and Andrew Qappik (designer), with support from David Cochrane and Deborah Hickman, Achieving a Dream, 2009. Wool and cotton, 172.7 x 301 cm. Photograph: David Kilabuk, © The Artists.*

A ski jumper sails through the air. A determined speed skater cuts a narrow path. And a hockey player raises his glove, signalling to an imagined arena. Among them are Inuit playing traditional games of the North. All of this takes place against a surreal backdrop, a landscape that is at once no place and many in the land now called Canada. This monumental tapestry, *Achieving a Dream*, commissioned for the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, not only brings together various sporting traditions and multiple geographies, it is also the collaborative work of many artists, including those who work with pencil and with wool.

The Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio, now part of the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts (which also includes a print shop) in Panniqtuuq, Nunavut, has been producing tapestries since the early 1970s. At minimum a collaboration between a local artist, who supplies the design, and a local weaver, who chooses materials and colours and translates the cartoon into wool, the tapestries have become a site for experimentation, storytelling, and community building.

Weaving is common among many North American Indigenous populations, including the Tsimshian of the Northwest Coast, who produce finger-woven blankets of cedar bark and mountain goat wool, and the Navajo of the American Southwest, who translate worldviews with the wool of the Navajo-Churro sheep, an animal that has been central to Navajo culture since the Spanish conquests of the sixteenth century. However, the presence of weaving among Inuit is a little different, as there is no natural source of spun fibre in the northernmost reaches of Canada. Instead, weaving came to Panniqtuuq through an employment scheme, part of the efforts of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to establish arts and crafts programs in the Arctic. Though this program coincided with a revival of the textile arts which swept Canada in the mid-twentieth century, it was regarded more prominently by Canadian government officials as a means of supplementing, or even replacing, the livelihood Inuit made on the land, and an incentive for Inuit to remain in settled communities rather than seasonal camps.

At the same time, weaving drew upon the skills and strengths of the women residing in Panniqtuuq. Experts at fashioning caribou and seal skins into amautiit (women's parkas) and kamiit (boots), in a climate where the fault in a seam could mean the difference between life and death, women were able to transfer the precision learned through sewing and working skins to weaving. According to early accounts from the weaving studio, the first women who participated in the training program quickly learned how to operate the European-style floor and tapestry looms and to work with wool, often imported from Iceland (Goldfarb 2020). But what emerged from this process was a fusion of European tapestry techniques and Inuit sensibilities. Unlike the tapestries produced at the major workshops of Gobelins and Aubusson, which have a distinct front and back, the two sides of the tapestries made at the Pangnirtung Studio are nearly indistinguishable. This neat finishing harks back to Inuit women's skills in other textile mediums.

Watch this interview with weaver Ena Angmarlik to learn more about the studio and the Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts & Crafts (4 min).

*Achieving a Dream* is a composite image, and while the addition of athletes suits the subject of the

commission, many of the other elements depicted are consistent with the broader output of the studio. Pangnirtung's tapestries are varied, but the artists often return to significant subjects: the land, mythical beings or animals—here signified by their tracks in the snow—and scenes of traditional Inuit life. Some have suggested that the designers return to these ideas again and again because they are popular with those who purchase Pangnirtung's tapestries. However, as Maria von Finckenstein has argued, it is reductive to reduce the richness of the studio's output to market concerns. The tapestries also offer Inuit a space to document their own narratives and history: "The motivation behind the scenes from the past is, I believe, a deeply felt need on the part of the artist-weavers to hold on to their cultural roots and to express them in their images. Says Leese Kakee, a long-time member of the studio, 'Some people might think these are just wall hangings, but they are a part of us, our ancestors, our lives'" (von Finckenstein 2002, 7).

The communal aspect of storytelling evident in the tapestries' imagery is also fundamental to the structure of the studio itself. For *Achieving a Dream*, for instance, Dinah Andersen, Sammy J. Kudluk, Mabel Nigiyok, and Louie Nigiyok supplied the individual design elements, which were assembled by Andrew Qappik, and weavers Oolassie Akulukjuk, Kawtysie Kakee, Leese Kakee, Anna Etuangat, and Kathy Battye spent 2,030 hours translating the image to wool, working in consultation with Uqqurmiut's artistic advisor, Deborah Hickman, and Scottish weaver David Cochrane, who advised on some of the techniques needed for creating the large-scale project. While the Olympic commission is one of the largest works the studio has completed, this collaborative form of working is also reflected at the smaller scale. As Hickman notes, dialogue and conversation are central to the process of selecting a drawing from those sourced from the community for weaving: "The images provided by the artists provoke discussions of the traditional Inuit way of life and the recounting of shared family stories. Personal interest in the subject or style of the drawing is a major consideration when the weaver is making her selection. She must also consider the suitability of the drawing to the weaving process. Together the tapestry weavers, studio manager, and arts adviser discuss the selected drawings before a final selection is made" (Hickman 2022, 47). This consultative process not only determines the final look of the work, it recalls methods of the historical tapestry workshops at Gobelins and Aubusson, upon which the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio is loosely based. Here again, the women of Panniqtuuq have adapted this method of working to their own needs and desires. Of his experience of working with the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio, David Cochrane notes how the studio was infused with laughter: "Their hands were always in motion, be it weaving or winding and crocheting during tea breaks—productive and happy" (Cochrane qtd. in Inuit Art Quarterly 2022).

The products of many hands, and of skills and stories passed through generations, the tapestries produced by the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio are truly collaborative works, and offer one example of how collective labour has shaped art in Canada. The history of art has long been centred on the mythos of the lone male artist-genius, thus neglecting the collectives and collaborative labour that is also part of art history. This module seeks to reframe some of the more celebrated Canadian artworks by thinking about what might be gained when artists work together.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.1

As the Pangnirtung Tapestry Studio weaving *Achieving a Dream* reveals, working collaboratively can yield some truly spectacular results. This module seeks to reframe some of the more celebrated Canadian artworks by thinking about what might be gained when artists work together and to examine where, when, and why artists have formed organizations, collective and collaborations. In a

few sentences, consider why you think artists might choose to work together or form artistic organizations. What benefits might come from such alliances?

## By the end of this module you will be able to:

- explain the major art associations and artistic groups that have shaped Canadian art
- describe the establishment of various Canadian artistic groups
- analyze the connection between particular visual media, politics, and nationalism in Canada
- evaluate the development of abstract art and its political context in Canada.

## It should take you:

**Achieving a Dream** Text 12 min, Video 4 min

**Developing modern art in Canada, together** Text 58 min, Video 59 min

**Imagined communities** Text 16 min, Video 10 min

**The rise of abstraction and the Automatistes** Text 44 min, Video 16 min

**Skawennati TimeTraveller™** Text 8 min, Video 6 min

**Learning journals** 8 x 20 = 160 min

**Total: Approximately 6 h 35 min**

## Key works:

Fig. 9.1 Oolassie Akulukjuk, Dinah Andersen, Kathy Battye, Anna Etuangat, Leese Kakee, Kawtysie Kakee, Sammy Kudluk, Louie Nigiyok, Mabel Nigiyok and Andrew Qappik (designer), with support from David Cochrane and Deborah Hickman, *Achieving a Dream* (2009)

Fig. 9.2 John A. Fraser, *A Shot in the Dawn, Lake Scugog* (1873)

Fig. 9.3 Ontario Society Members at the Opening of the Art Museum of Toronto (1918)

Fig. 9.4 George A. Reid, *Mortgaging the Homestead* (1890)

Fig. 9.5 Paul Peel, *After the Bath* (1890)

Fig. 9.6 J.E.H. MacDonald, *The Arts and Letters Club* (no date)

Fig. 9.7 J.E.H. MacDonald, *Goat Range Rocky Mountains* (1932)

Fig. 9.8 A.C. Leighton, *Mount Skoki* (1935)

Fig. 9.9 Edwin Holgate, *Edwin A. Sherrard at the Violin* (1934)

Fig. 9.10 Lillias Torrance Newton, *Self-portrait* (c. 1929)

Fig. 9.11 Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *School in a Garden* (c. 1934)

National Film Board of Canada, "Headline Hunters" (1945) film

Fig. 9.12 National Film Board, "Photostory #308: New Canadian Committee Advises Arctic Craftsmen: Eskimo Art Approved by Experts" (1962)

Fig. 9.13 Paul-Émile Borduas, *Abstraction verte* (1941)

Fig. 9.14 Paul-Émile Borduas, *Sous le vent de l'île* (1947)

## Developing modern art in Canada, together

Art history is traditionally presented as the individual (male genius)'s struggle for self-expression, but artistic collaboration and collectivity have been central in art. This is particularly the case with the advent of modern art in the 19th century. Because art movements like Impressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism (to name but a few), were radical breaks from traditional academic artistic convention, it was particularly useful for modern artists to gather together, support one another, and help each other find exhibition venues to show their works to the public. Artist organizations and collectives worked together towards similar goals, united by political, economic, professional, or historical circumstances.

Artist organizations and societies were one of the earliest forms of art establishments in Canada. Beginning in the 19th century, groups of visual artists began forming often short-lived societies that have had a major influence on both professional and amateur artists. These organizations sit somewhere between the individual artist and the formal art institution. Art history is often taught as an ongoing series or chronology of artists. Examined in this way, artists and their work appear as unique and isolated. Focus is placed on the process, method, and output of the individual. Recently, re-examinations of the field of art history have called into question institutions—museums, galleries, schools—as determining which artists and works become a part of the art historical canon and are, in this regard, deeply problematic for their exclusionary biases. This is particularly evident in the nation-building exercise of Canadian identity, in which major institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada were mandated with exhibitions of artists that reflected particular conceptions of Canadianness.

Both the artist and the institution, however, sit at extremes. In the middle ground is the coming together of artists who want a community of shared outlooks and visual explorations, but not the imposition of stifling institutional mandates. In this middle ground, artists can take risks while still being supported by a community of peers. Sometimes these risks are played out in paint on a canvas, and sometimes these risks come in the form of political activism.

Throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries, collectives, associations, societies, and other groups were formed around unifying ideas presented through exhibitions, pamphlets, and manifestos. These groups were often deeply concerned with considerations of identity. In some instances, the coming together of artists would crystalize into a much more rigid and formalized institution. For example, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA), established in 1880, was given its title by the British Queen Victoria and followed European traditions of selective membership to an art academy and calculated exhibitions of work. The RCA mirrored European models of art education and display, but had three key goals that were specifically Canadian outlined in its organizational constitution: to hold exhibitions in principal cities across what was then known as the Dominion of Canada; to establish a school of art and design; and to establish a national gallery at the seat of government. The RCA was the foundation for the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa as it exists today.

Founded in 1867, the same year as the Canadian Confederation, the Society of Canadian Artists (CSA) came together and pushed against the RCA's commitment to the European organizational structures of the art academy. Instead, the CSA aspired to sell and exhibit work by Canadian artists in a market that still preferred European art. It was one of the first attempts to establish and support a local Canadian art market. Members of this group include painters Allen Edson, Adophe Vogt, CJ Way, Henry Sandham, and John Fraser. Fraser played an important role in establishing the Society of Canadian Artists, though the organization quickly dwindled after he left in the same year it was founded. While there was no unifying visual style amongst its members, many of the artists emphasized qualities of ruggedness and demonstrated an interest in the qualities of light,



as seen in Fraser's *A Shot in the Dawn, Lake Scugog*. These qualities continued to predominate in landscapes painted by the Society of Canadian Artists throughout the 20th century.



Figure 9.2 John A. Fraser, *A Shot in the Dawn, Lake Scugog*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 76.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikimedia user The AMICA Library.

Fraser went on to serve as the first Vice-President of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA), founded in 1872 in Toronto. Like the RCA, it had a mandate to foster original art and hold an annual exhibition. Unlike the RCA, it focused on supporting the work and ideas of Ontario-based artists. Part of its constitution was the establishment in Toronto of a permanent public art gallery, which it did in 1900 under the name Art Museum of Toronto, now the Art Gallery of Ontario. The organization was also concerned about the lack of art education in Ontario. By 1912, the OSA was granted a charter by the provincial government to establish an art college. George Reid was appointed the Ontario College of Art's first principal.



Figure 9.3 Ontario Society Members at the Opening of the Art Museum of Toronto, April 4, 1918 *The Toronto Star Weekly*, April 20, 1918 Reference Code: F 1140-8 Archives of Ontario

A NOTABLE GATHERING OF CANADIAN ARTISTS AT THE OPENING OF THE ART MUSEUM OF TORONTO.  
Standing (left to right): Herbert Palmer, Fred Haines, Mr. Maxwell, Capt. Foxbury, F. M. Bell-Smith, C. W. Jefferys, E. Dyonnet, Homer Watson, F. Challenger, Mr. Cutts, Robt. Holmes, Owen Staples, F. Manly (in rear), T. Greene, Walter Allward. Sitting (left to right): McGillivray Knowles, G. A. Reid, T. Martin, (Miss) Mary Winch, (Mrs.) Gertrude Spurr Cutts, E. Wiley Grier, Robt. Gagan, Horatio Walker.

Artist organizations such as the RCA and OSA quickly formalized institutions, and also fostered a flourishing of Canadian artistic production through stability, structure, and newly generated interest in art produced in Canada. Within this climate, artists who were members of these organizations were able to focus on new subjects and styles. Reid, for example, turned to subjects inspired by his upbringing on a farm in rural Ontario. His work, *Mortgaging the Homestead*, envisions a moment from his childhood in which his family was forced to mortgage their farm, a necessity in hard times that meant a family giving up control over their land and their future. The subject was deeply compelling for an Ontario audience aware of the stigma of failure that was attached to the process. Instead of the rugged and sweeping landscapes that dominated Canadian painting throughout the 19th century, artists such as Reid and fellow OSA artist Paul Peel turned to more intimate subjects, such as these domestic scenes.

VIEW GEORGE REID'S *MORTGAGING THE HOMESTEAD* HERE

Figure 9.4 George A. Reid, *Mortgaging the Homestead* (1890) oil on canvas, 130.1 x 213.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada



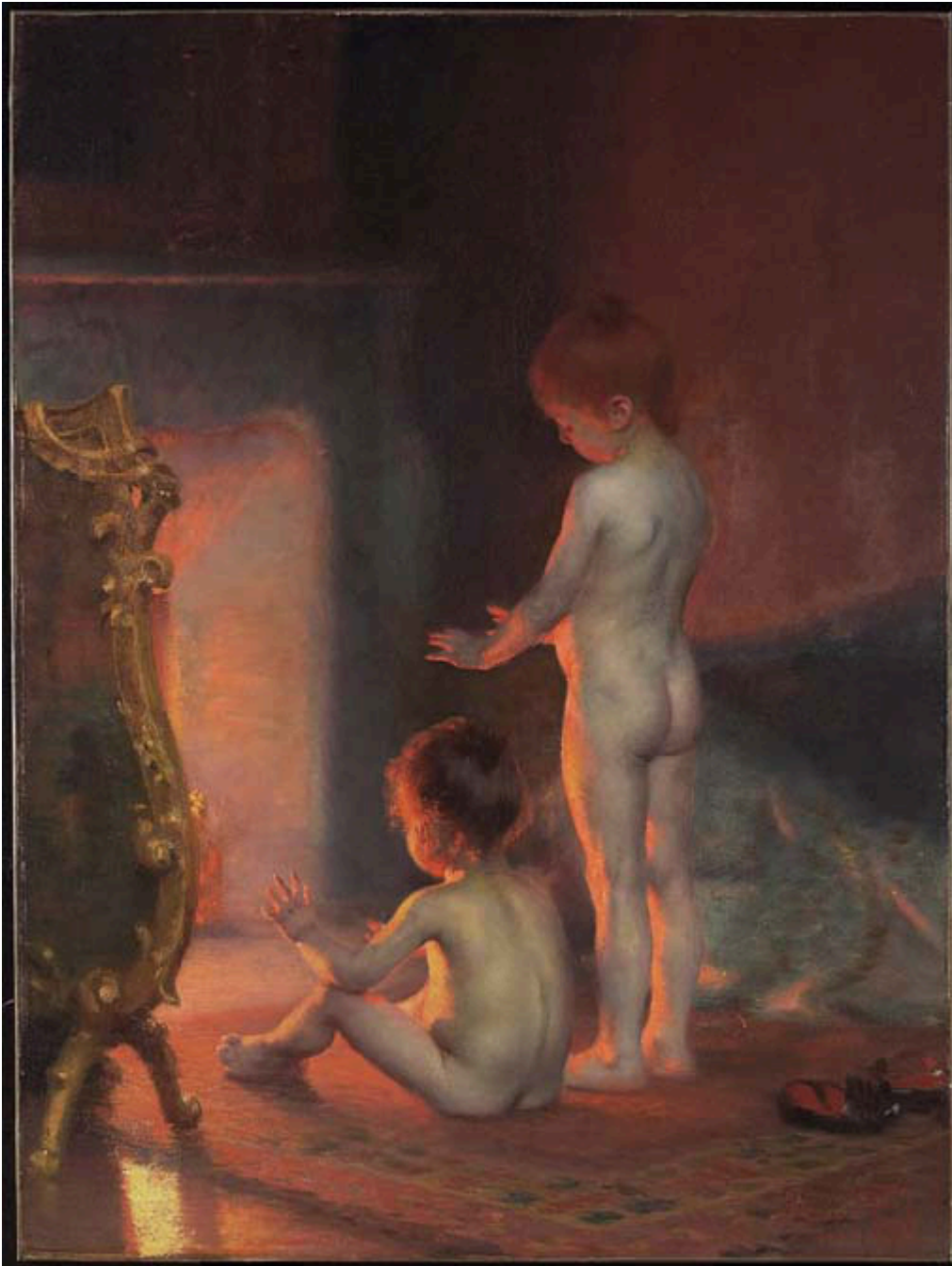


Figure 9.5 Paul Peel, *After the Bath*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 147.3 x 110.5 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Gift of the Government of the Province of Ontario, 1972. © Art Gallery of Ontario

Both the RCA and OSA are examples of artists coming together to address what they saw as a gap in art production support in Canada. The turn towards developing Canadian styles and subjects was artist-led, though this focus was soon overshadowed as both the RCA and OSA became formalized from artist associations into institutions—the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario—which influenced the direction of art in Canada through funding and exhibition. For example, the National Gallery of Canada was quick to support the work of the Group of Seven as a marker of national identity. The RCA's inclination towards a modern, Canadian style can be considered a stepping stone towards the National Gallery of Canada's aim to create a cohesive history of art in Canada. Ordering the works of artists such as John A. Fraser, to George Reid, to the Group of Seven parallels a development in which European visual modes applied to Canadian subjects for a

European audience, to European visual modes applied to Canadian subjects for a Canadian audience, and then to modern Canadian visual modes of Canadian subjects for a Canadian audience.

The artists who formed the Group of Seven came together early in their careers through their employment at commercial design firms. It was while working at Toronto-based design firm Grip Ltd. that Tom Thomson, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Frederick Varley, Frank Johnston and Franklin Carmichael first met and discovered their common artistic interests. The artists began taking weekend sketching trips together, and would often gather informally at Toronto's Arts and Letters Club to socialise and discuss new directions for Canadian art.

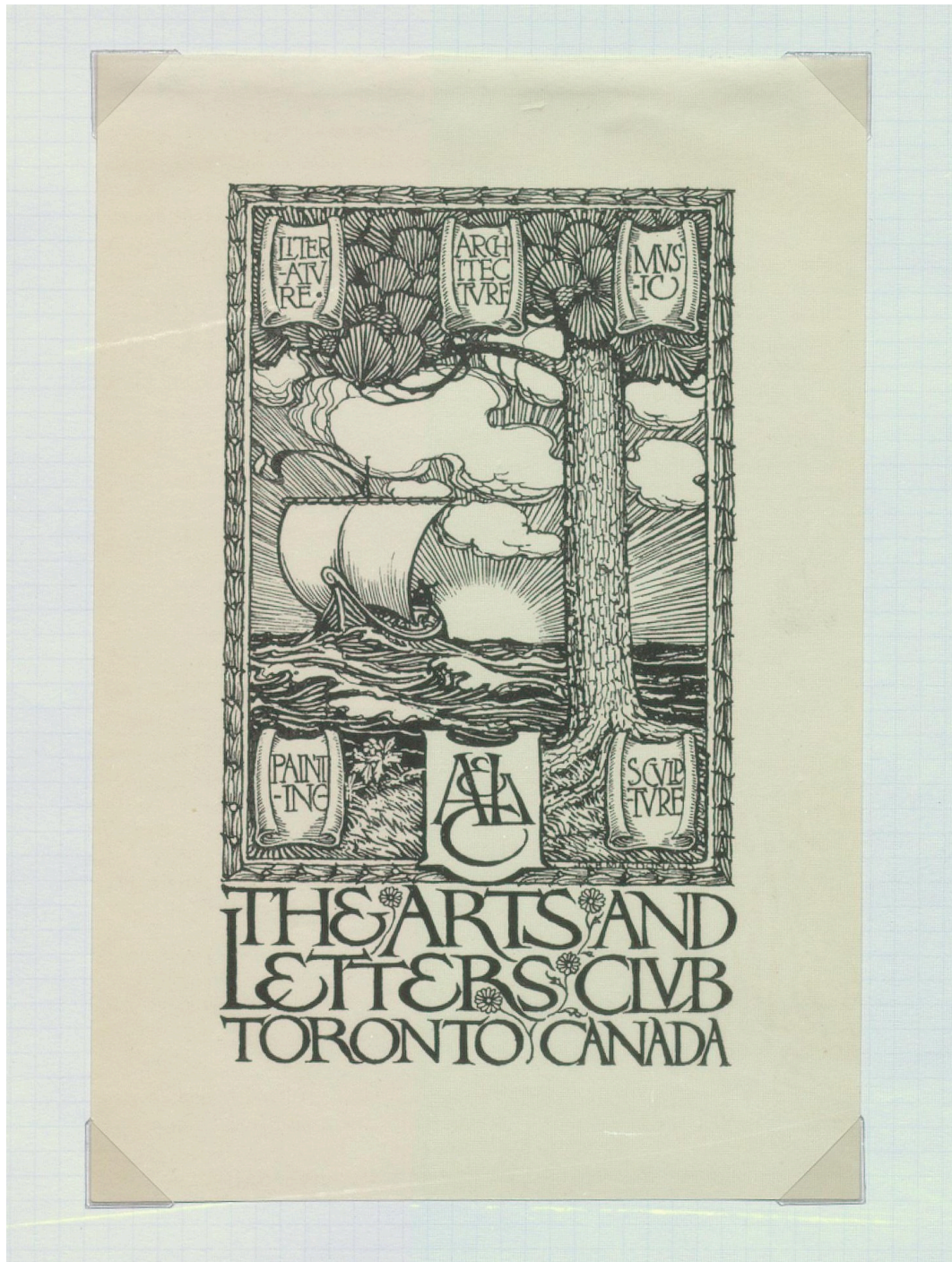


Figure 9.6 J.E.H. MacDonald, *The Arts and Letters Club*, no date. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Toronto. Uploaded by Flickr user Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, UofT.

A similar coming-together of artists occurred across Canada throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries that reflected both emerging national and more regional concerns. As settlements became cities and regions were folded into Canadian Confederation as provinces, settler artistic production began to increase. For example, the 1890s saw a flourishing of art and artists in what is now known as Alberta. (To give you a sense of the growth in the West, in 1906 Calgary and Edmonton each had a population of approximately 14,000; by 1914 it was 72,000.) In 1909 the Calgary Agricultural Exhibition held a display of more than 200 works by notable Canadian and European painters, including William Brymner and George Reid. In 1912 this event became the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.

Read about the early years of the Calgary Stampede on the event's website.

The Group of Seven influenced the development of art in the Canadian West. In the 1920s, its members Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer and J.E.H. MacDonald traveled to the Rockies. In 1928, the Calgary Museum displayed an exhibition of Group of Seven paintings. Many painters from the region went to the Ontario College of Art to study under Group of Seven painters. Harry Hunt, president of the Calgary Art Club, began collaborating with the National Gallery of Canada to establish an Alberta Society of Artists to select works to exhibit nationally.

However, not all artists embraced the style of the Group of Seven, whose own approach to painting was less interested in naturalistic representation or realistic approaches to painting and towards a more abstract formal exploration. A.C. Leighton, for example, a British-born and -trained painter who settled in Canada, was interested in painting the extraordinary landscape of the Rocky Mountains in traditional English modes. In 1931, A.C. Leighton formed the Alberta Society of Artists and was its first president. A work such as *Mount Skoki*, painted in 1935, is closer in formal style to the work of John A. Fraser—think of his 1873 *A Shot in the Dawn*—than to the geometric, colourful, and bold forms of land painted by the Group of Seven; a good comparison being J.E.H. MacDonald's *Goat Range, Rocky Mountains* (1932). Both paintings are detailed renderings of the land informed by a careful study of form and light. MacDonald's image of the Rockies reveals his graphic arts training with its emphasis on dark outlining and mountain formations turned into almost-abstract triangular forms, while Leighton's much more detailed and realistic portrayal is more academic in style. It is perhaps no wonder then, that this painting gained Leighton acceptance into the RCA in 1935.





Fig. 9.7 J.E.H. MacDonald, *Goat Range, Rocky Mountains*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 53.8 x 66.2 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Vaughan. Public domain. Uploaded by Wikimedia user McMichael Art Gallery.



Figure 9.8 A.C. Leighton, *Mount Skoki*, 1935. Oil on canvas. Leighton Art Centre Museum and Archives, Millarville. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

Compare John A Fraser's *A Shot in the Dawn* (1873), A.C. Leighton's *Mount Skoki* (1935) and J. E. H. MacDonald's *Goat Range, Rocky Mountains* (1932). What subject does each present? What geographical location? How does each artist represent the place depicted through composition, colour, and detail?

The following excerpts come from the introduction of art historian Anne Whitelaw's *Spaces and Places for Art*. This book examines the development of art institutions in western Canada from 1912 to the 1990s. Western art museums and art associations were initially dependent on loan exhibitions from the National Gallery of Canada, but art galleries across the western part of the country gradually began to build their own collections and exhibitions, forming organizations that made them less reliant on institutions and government agencies in Ottawa.

*On a cold night in late October 1924, hundreds of Edmonton's citizens made their way to the Palm Room of the city's lavish Hotel Macdonald to view the first exhibition of the newly formed Edmonton Museum of Arts. Its inaugural display featured sixty works from local collections as well as twenty-four paintings on loan from the National Gallery of Canada, all of which, according to press reports, were received enthusiastically by the public. The inclusion of works from the National Gallery's collection was not an unusual occurrence for a new art organization trying to establish its legitimacy in what was still viewed as a relatively remote part of the country: the Winnipeg Art Gallery, founded in 1912 and the only other art gallery west of Toronto in 1924, was similarly dependent on National Gallery loan exhibitions for its ongoing activities, as were the art associations of smaller communities such as Brandon and Moose Jaw. Instituted in 1913, the loan exhibition program was one of the primary means by which the National Gallery was able to overcome the limits of its location in Ottawa and achieve its mandate of building Canadian public interest in the fine arts and promoting the nation's artists. Closely following the passing of the National Gallery of Canada Act in 1913, its director, Eric Brown, justified the establishment of the loan exhibition program as being the best way to demonstrate the quality of Canadian art and to encourage individual Canadians to purchase in that area. Brown also argued that loan exhibitions would ultimately encourage the formation of art societies and institutions across the country, thereby increasing the appreciation and collecting of Canadian art.*

*The loan exhibitions are just one example of the complicated relationship between the National Gallery and art organizations in western Canada that this book explores. While the loan exhibitions mutually benefited both the national institution and regional galleries, they also became sources of tension as art organizations in the west sought more influence over the content of the exhibitions and the manner in which they travelled from centre to centre. The National Gallery, for its part, fought to maintain control over the kinds of work that circulated from its collections and to manage the movement of the exhibitions across the country. Over the roughly eighty years covered by this book, art galleries in western Canada both relied upon and resisted the leadership and assistance given by the National Gallery and other federal or federally funded institutions.*

Whitelaw continues on to explain:

*Arts organizations emerged in western Canada at about the same pace that cities developed in the region, with public galleries usually being formed by societies of either artists or art lovers as soon as some form of support from civic government – whether financial or in-kind – could be obtained. The Winnipeg Museum of Fine Arts (now the Winnipeg Art Gallery) was established in 1912 as a result of*



*the activities of the Manitoba Society of Artists and the Western Art Association (formerly the Winnipeg branch of the Women's Art Association of Canada), and after spending its formative years in the city's Industrial Bureau, it was housed in Winnipeg's newly erected Civic Auditorium from 1933 until its current building opened in 1971; the Edmonton Museum of Arts (now the Art Gallery of Alberta) was established in 1924 by a group of private citizens with the support of the Edmonton Art Club and moved frequently until erecting its own building in 1968; the Vancouver Art Gallery was founded through the generosity of some of the city's leading citizens who raised enough funds for a building as well as a collection of mostly British paintings in 1931; in Saskatchewan, the Saskatoon Art Centre, founded in 1944, afforded meeting and exhibition space to the Saskatoon Art Association, the Camera Club, and the Archaeological Society until funds and a significant donation of artworks from businessman Frederick Mendel made possible the construction of a permanent building – what would become the Mendel Art Gallery – in 1964; the Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery was finally opened at the University of Saskatchewan's Regina College in 1953, seventeen years after Norman MacKenzie's bequest of a significant portion of his collection and funds for a building; also in Regina, the Public Library's chief librarian Marjorie Dunlop began to organize art exhibitions in the periodicals reading room in 1948 and successfully advocated for the inclusion of an art gallery in the new public library building, erected in 1964; the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria opened in 1951 but the Island Arts and Crafts Society had presented exhibitions in the city since 1910; and while the Glenbow Museum is currently Calgary's principal collecting institution, from 1939 to its sale in 1960, Coste House was home to many of the city's art and theatrical societies, exhibitions, as well as the first site of the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (what would become the Alberta College of Art and Design). Meanwhile, artists and interested amateurs formed art societies in smaller towns across western Canada, many of which found spaces for exhibition of their members' works in library and community halls, spaces that also displayed traveling exhibitions from the National Gallery or smaller shows organized by art galleries and museums in the regions' larger centres (Whitelaw 2017, 3-6).*

### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.3

What roots and origins do museums and galleries have in your region? Visit the website of a public museum or gallery in your area and have a look at the “About” section. When was it established? By whom? What community(ies) did it serve then, and who does it serve now?

Artist organizations and associations in Ontario throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries supported many facets of artistic development, namely: education, display, and commercial sales. This focus, which in many earlier art historical texts is mapped out as a progression of art-making in Canada that culminates in the establishment of the National Gallery of Canada and the work of the Group of Seven, often marginalizes the many associations that emerged in the same period that did not fit within this progression and nationalist outlook. The development of modern art in the early 20th century in Canada is also a story of artist organizations and groups who were less concerned with nationalism and in many cases challenged the conservatism of the RCA and/or were intent on participating in international artistic trends.

In 1920, Montreal was a busy commercial centre, far ahead of Toronto, but conservative in matters of art; with few exceptions, local critics and collectors still preferred European, more academic artistic styles. In this milieu, a selection of former students of artist William Brymner at the Art Association of Montreal pooled their resources and rented a house at 305 Beaver Hall Hill. The upper floors were individual studios and the main level,

their exhibition space. The Beaver Hall Group, as the artists became known, were supported by A.Y. Jackson (their first president), and were a non-structured association of artists including Mabel May, Lillias Torrance Newton, Randolph Hewton, Edwin Holgate, Mabel Lockerby, Anne Savage, Emily Coonan, Adrien Hébert, and Henri Hébert. Prudence Heward was loosely affiliated with the Group but did not share space at Beaver Hill or participate in the first major Beaver Hall Group exhibition in 1921. The Group was short-lived, disbanding in 1923, but the friendships and alliances that formed lasted into the 1930s and 40s. Like many artist associations in Canada, the group formed out of friendships, but supported each other as artists—much needed given the still-developing art scene in Montreal—and shared a dedication to modernist approaches to art-making. As a group, they were not fervently committed to a single subject or nationalist view like the Group of Seven who formed in the same year; they are nonetheless now best known for their emphasis on figurative and urban subjects.

What made the Beaver Hall Group particularly remarkable was that almost exactly half of its members were women at a time when being a professional artist in Montreal often meant being a man. In fact, as time wore on they were often seen (mistakenly) by scholars as a group of women artists. The critical literature on the group is thin and up until recently they have received little notice. However, beginning in the 1990s a number of the Beaver Hall artists were rediscovered by female academics, some of whose scholarship focused solely on the female members of the group, contributing to the notion that the group was dominated by women artists (Meadowcroft 1999; Walters 2005). This view was revisited and critiqued in the somewhat recent touring exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *1920s Modernism in Montreal: The Beaver Hall Group* in 2015 (Des Rochers and Foss). Given that women have historically been overlooked in art history, it is perhaps no wonder that feminist art historians used the Beaver Hall to attempt to correct this oversight.

Watch the following NFB documentary, *By Woman's Hand* (1994, 59min), for more on some of the women artists involved with the Beaver Hall, through the eyes of Prudence Heward, Sarah Robertson and Anne Savage.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-1>

In an essay on Beaver Hall member Anne Savage, Katrie Chagnon and Elisabeth Otto address the miscategorization of the Savage and her colleagues:

*This reassessment takes place in light of recent scholarship questioning the ideological and gender-based opposition between the Group of Seven and the Beaver Hall Group stemming from discourses on painting of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, for many years, Canadian art historians fostered the dichotomy between the manly aesthetic of the Toronto-based Group of Seven, focused on the idea of wild and uninhabited nature, and the supposedly “humanized,” individualized and thus feminized aesthetic of the Montréal-based Beaver Hall Group, of which Savage was a member. Seen by feminist art historians as a counterpoint to the “macho ‘bushwhacking’ that surrounded the Group of Seven,” the vision of nature espoused by Savage and her colleagues (including Mabel Lockerby, Mabel May, Kathleen Morris and Sarah Robertson) is often seen as contributing to the creation of an idyllic image of the Québec countryside, to the extent where it has often been equated with a nostalgic form of regionalism (n.d.).*





Figure 9.9 Edwin Holgate, *Edwin A. Sherrard at the violin*, 1934. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal. Uploaded by Wikimedia user Guerinf.

Figure painting was definitely the prerogative of Montreal artists during the early 1930s. Ontario-born, Montreal-based Edwin Holgate was best known for his portraits and nude figure studies. He was one of the “elders” of the Beaver Hall Group of painters. Holgate was fluent in French and was introduced to Montreal’s francophone literary circles, which helped him access collectors; he was able to cross the cultural barriers between French and English Montreal, and his influence was felt in both communities. After leaving Ontario, he studied at the Art Association of Montreal with William Brymner and then Maurice Cullen before travelling to Paris to further his studies. Holgate returned to Montreal in 1914, travelling via Russia and Japan to Victoria, due to the outbreak of the First World War. He enlisted in the Fourth Canadian Division and served in the ranks until 1919. He was a key figure in the Beaver Hall Group, and in 1928 started teaching graphic art at the École des Beaux-Arts. His work was included in several Group of Seven exhibitions, and he became a member in 1929. Holgate was also a member of various social and professional groups, including the Canadian Group of Painters, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, the Casoar-Club, and the Pen and Pencil Club. His most notable works, like *Edwin A. Sherrard at the Violin*, demonstrate an individual approach to portraying the human figure, a method that reveals the ascendancy of modernist figure painting over the traditional portrait image (Paikowsky 135).

[VIEW LILIAS TORRANCE NEWTON'S SELF-PORTRAIT HERE](#)

Figure 9.10 Liliás Torrance Newton, *Self-portrait*, c. 1929, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 76.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada

Edwin Holgate and Liliás Torrance Newton worked to revitalize art education at the Art Association of

Montreal. You can read more about Liliás Torrance Newton on the National Gallery of Canada's website. In her *Self-Portrait* from the late 1920s, Newton applies her skills as a modernist painter of individual character to herself. She portrays herself as independent, modern and sophisticated—an example of the new progressive Canadian woman. Her direct gaze and composed facial expression command the viewer's attention. In contrast to the Group of Seven in Toronto, the Beaver Hall Group offered an alternative, more progressive view of modern art. Brian Foss has noted that the Beaver Hall was, broadly put, an inclusive collection of artists (unlike the Group of Seven). They encouraged women artists and validated their work and the group featured both Francophone and Anglophone artists, bridging a divide in the Montreal scene (Carleton, n.d.). While the Beaver Hall artists were diverse in their subjects and handling of paint on canvas, they did share a preference for striking colour masses and strong sculptural forms. They were urban artists who painted what they saw in the city and its inhabitants with a modernist spirit.

Canadian Group of Painters (CGP) catalogue 1947-48

An outgrowth of the Group of Seven, the Canadian Group of Painters (CGP) formed in Toronto in 1933 and disbanded in 1969. It brought together many of Canada's most recognized artists such as B.C. Binning, Jack Bush, Emily Carr, Charles Comfort, Paraskeva Clark, Prudence Heward, Yvonne McKague Housser, Jock Macdonald, Pegi Nicol MacLeod, and Isabel McLaughlin, among others. The CGP regarded itself as a successor to the Group of Seven, "to encourage and foster the growth of art in Canada which has a national character." Although landscape continued to be the dominant subject among the members of the group, the CGP did encourage modern ideas, techniques, and subjects. As Alicia Boutilier writes,

*[f]ar from being an end or transit point, the CGP was considered by many at the time to be a "vital force." What made it such a force was its engagement with modern life—in subject matter, artistic approach and social activity—against a background of the Depression, World War II, postwar reconstruction and the Cold War. In the spirit of the times, the CGP sought a national bond, while at the same time displaying a progressively internationalist outlook. It was part of the move toward greater cultural organization in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s and participated in the expanding social consciousness of the period (Boutilier 11).*

There were good reasons to form a new group. President Lawren Harris wanted to fill a need in Canada and form a group that could counter the Royal Canadian Academy. The CGP also sought federal support; even though it seemed like a long shot in the Depression, they sought financial support for shipping and packing artworks for exhibitions, which was their main focus.

VIEW PEGI NICOL MACLEOD'S *SCHOOL IN A GARDEN* HERE

Figure 9.11 Pegi Nicol MacLeod, *School in a Garden*, c. 1934 oil on canvas, 112.4 x 99 cm, National Gallery of Canada

Many of the key figures in the CGP saw themselves and their artistic tendencies as more in line with international, largely European art movements; Pegi Nicol MacLeod was one such artist. Born in Listowel, Ontario in 1904, she studied at the Ottawa Art Association and at the École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal in the early 1920s. During this time, she won five medals for her exceptional work, including the Willingdon prize for the landscape *The Log Run* in 1931. She joined the CGP in 1937, the same year she married and moved to New York. MacLeod's artworks stand out from those of her contemporaries like the Group of Seven, whose experimentations with Post-Impressionism produced paintings that today almost seem retrograde. In life and in her art making, MacLeod was a bohemian whose emphasis on freedom is borne out in the very way in which she executed her paintings. In a 1947 letter to painter Jack Humphrey, MacLeod wrote: "Art should be freedom; its essence is freedom; Rules, laws, controls, standards—these works smell of the academy (power, lust to dictate)" (Murray 270).

Her modernist self-portraits, figure studies, paintings of children, still-lives and landscapes are characterized by a fluidity of form and vibrant colour. MacLeod's paintings are typified by their expressive flowing brushwork verging toward abstraction. There were few artists working in Canada alongside MacLeod who captured the

vivacity, movement, and dynamism of people and life as she did (Smither 67). Many scholars have noted that MacLeod's interest lay in modernist developments in contemporary painting and that her technique and style had no equivalent during her lifetime.

Throughout her bohemian and vibrant social life, painting remained MacLeod's focus as she gradually developed her unique style. An active member in the CGP, her career was supported by Eric Brown, the first director of the National Gallery of Canada, who arranged for many of her paintings to be included in a CGP exhibition after she had moved to New York City in 1937. *School in a Garden* was completed in Ottawa just prior to her departure. One of a series of studies of children working in the school garden across the street from her parents' Ottawa house, the painting reveals the sinuous, flowing arabesque brushwork which is a signature of her artistic style.

MacLeod did not obey convention. Her friends and fellow free-spirited artists helped to nurture her independence, encouraging her wilful experimentation—much to the chagrin of her mother, who disapproved of MacLeod's artistic endeavours. Her friend Marjorie explained that it was not exactly her painting that bothered her parents: "It was more the way she painted that they could not understand. The books she read, the music she played, everything she thought and did was contrary to their conditioning" (Brandon 32). MacLeod's artworks were praised during her lifetime; however, being a woman artist with a modern artistic style that defied convention meant that MacLeod was overlooked for decades by those writing the first textbooks on art history in Canada. More recent critical examinations of how the artistic canon has been produced and reproduced has renewed attention in MacLeod's singular paintings.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.4

Research one of the artists from the Beaver Hall Group or Canadian Group of Painters. Research one of their artworks, and write a paragraph or two (200-500 words) visually describing and analyzing it.

## Imagined communities

Historically, war is a time of innovation and resourcefulness. In the recovery from war there is often a period of stability that leads to a continuance of industriousness—but of course it can't last for long. After the First World War (1914-1918), Canada was productive economically and culturally—we see this in the 1920s with the emergence of so many artistic developments: the Group of Seven's first show in 1920; the Beaver Hall exhibition of 1921; and the Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art in 1927, to name only a few. Stability is difficult to sustain, however. The stock market crash of 1929 officially signalled the beginning of the Great Depression, which began a 12-year economic slump that affected all of the Western industrialized countries. From 1930 to 1933, the Canadian economy suffered a rapid collapse, and the recovery that eventually followed was slow. In some respects, the Second World War (1939-1945), which Canada entered to support Britain, brought Canada and the world out of the Great Depression. The Second World War was instrumental in defining Canada, transforming the country from a relatively overlooked country on the periphery of global affairs into a critical player in the war, one of the 20th century's most important struggles. New initiatives were developed after 1945 to foster a sense of national cohesion. In this next section we will look at one project—The National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) Still Photograph Division—mandated by the federal government to promote the nation.

Benedict Anderson's now-seminal book *Imagined Communities*, first published in 1983, reshaped the study

of nations and nationalism. In his book, Anderson asks what we mean by “nation” or “nationalism;” according to him, these are not natural, but relatively modern, phenomena. According to Anderson’s definition nations and nationalism are “imagined communities,” made up of groups of people who see themselves as belonging to the same community, even if they have never met, and otherwise may have nothing in common. Anderson argues that the nation is inherently limited in scope and sovereign in nature. It is imagined because the actuality of even the smallest nation exceeds what it is possible for a single person to know—one cannot know every person in a nation, just as one cannot know every aspect of its economy, geography, history, and so forth. Anderson’s approach emphasizes the material conditions that shape culture as well as the institutions that facilitate its reproduction—from newspapers and novels to censuses, maps, and museums. He writes: “the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for “re-presenting” the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson 2006, 24-25).

In Canada, both the National Film Board (NFB) and its Still Photography Division were instrumental in the creation of an imagined community. The NFB’s Still Photography Division was just that, a division of the larger NFB, which had been established in 1939 by an act of Parliament as an “advisory body rather than a production house, yet it was granted extensive powers over other governmental film work including advising on production, financing, distribution, and liaison within and beyond the government” (Payne 2013, 20). In 1941 the Still Photography Division of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau was transferred to the NFB. Art historian Carol Payne writes of the directive of the Still Division:

*From the earliest days of the NFB, the question of national unity had been central to its mission and, accordingly, that mandate extended to Photo Services. Because the NFB was founded in 1939 and shortly became known for wartime films, it may appear to have been formed largely in response to the dramatic events of the Second World War, but the archival record tells a different story. The National Film Act of 1939 prioritized anxieties around Canadian unity over concerns about the war. The Film Act charged the government film commissioner with “the making and distribution of national films designed to help Canadians in all parts of Canada to understand the ways of living and the problems of Canadians in other parts” (Marchessault 1995, 131-46). The mandate, which echoed the NFB’s emphasis on cinema (and photography) as a means for “one part of Canada . . . to know . . . other [parts of Canada],” would be reiterated throughout the NFB’s history and accentuated by its leaders, including [John] Grierson. Indeed, it became such a prominent rallying cry that it would be echoed by staff for years. In a 1996 interview, long-time photographer Gar Lunney, for example, reiterated that rhetoric proudly, announcing, “Our job . . . in the National Film Board, as I understand it, was: to show Canada to Canadians” (Payne 2013, 21-23).*

Documentary filmmaker Bob Lower examines the ways that the NFB represented Canada to Canadians in his 2014 film, *Shameless Propaganda*. Lower watched 400 films created by the National Film Board of Canada in order to make his own documentary about the NFB that demonstrated a self-awareness about the ways the NFB produced information.

Watch this short NFB film from 1945 titled “Headline Hunters” (10 min) that chronicles the complex ways information about the war is recorded, edited, and distributed. As you watch the film, consider John Grierson’s famous quip, “Art is not a mirror, but a hammer.”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-2>

The NFB Still Photography division was intent on producing an “official” portrait of Canadian society, using images to construct an imagined community. “The Division commissioned its photographers to travel across the country, where they shot approximately 250,000 images of people, places, work, leisure, and cultural activities. Millions of Canadians as well as international audiences saw these photographs reproduced in newspapers, magazines, books, filmstrips, and exhibitions” (Agnes 2016). The Still Photography Division of the NFB was realized to tap into photography’s potential for reaching a large public through mass-circulation publications, particularly newspapers. The division produced representations using a common and accessible medium—photography—to capture images of the everyday. These images were powerful in part because they were so familiar, so widely available, and so unassuming: they formed a kind of backdrop to daily life in Canada.

Greirson used the growing collection of photographs to produce a form of editorial called a photostory. A photostory is a highly-crafted combination of text and image that often takes one idea or theme as its subject. For the NFB Still Photography Division, the main story was focused on Canadian civilian life during the war, and on what Canadian citizens and industry were doing at home to support the military. The photostory centers photographs as the primary source of information, with text supporting images instead of the other way around.

The NFB employed photographers to work somewhat independently in the field, loosely following assignments given to them. But the photographers were part of a much larger enterprise, including editors, writers, clients, and bureaucrats, and were considered only the partial authors of the final images. Editorial strategies such as cropping (excluding particular parts of a photograph), scale (placing large and small photographs alongside one another for emphasis), vantage (photographs of the same subject taken from various perspectives and angles), and considerations of balance, flow, pattern, and repetition worked to accentuate ideas and narratives within a photostory. Once completed, photostories would be circulated in various print media and magazines.

The NFB and photostories remained dominant until the end of the 1950s. By 1959, the NFB had amassed 13,000 negatives and made them accessible through displays and special projects. Though the war may have ended, the NFB photostories continued to perpetuate propagandistic values, serving the needs and mandates of government policy, particularly in fostering a sense of Canadian identity. As Payne’s study points out, the images and photostories reproduced for a collective audience via mass media publications were celebratory and optimistic. Taken together, the NFB’s Still Division photographs create a composite portrait of Canada made from nationalistic and bureaucratic points of view and aspired not just to present an image of the country, but *the* image. As a result, the NFB holds a unique position in the history of Canadian visual culture as a conveyor of shared values and governmental programs in photographic form.

The National Gallery of Canada now has a searchable database of over 800 photostories, created between 1955 and 1971 by the National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division, which you can explore here.





Figure 9.12 Chris Lund, Ted Grant, unattributed, B. Korda, Doug Wilkinson, Gar Lunney, National Film Board, Photostory #308: New Canadian Committee Advises Arctic Craftsmen: Eskimo Art Approved by Experts, 1962. Fair dealing copyright Canada.

## LEARNING JOURNAL 9.5

What is happening in the photostory above? Think about how the images work together visually (are some bigger, are some higher on the page than others, what narrative does this create)? Who put this story together? Who is photographed and how? Who is its intended audience? How is text used to support the images? If the NFB's mandate is to show Canada to Canadians, what is being demonstrated in this photostory?

The Government of Canada and the National Film Board used visual images to unite and mobilize Canadians during the war, and to foster an ongoing sense of Canadian identity. At the same time that photographic images were increasingly used as political tools, artists too were moving away from representation towards abstraction. This shift was a reflection of the ways, in part, that photography filled the need for representational images, freeing up artists to move towards expression. Both, however, were intimately tied up in the political. In Canada, particularly in Quebec, abstraction emerged as a response to tense political contexts and identities that refuted the representational, which artists viewed as restrictive and stifling to political and artistic advancement.

## The rise of abstraction and the Automatistes

Watch The Art Assignment video “The Case for Abstraction,” (9 m) below:



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-3>*

As “The Case for Abstraction” outlines, abstract or non-objective art uses forms such as geometric shapes or gestural marks which have no source at all in an external visual reality. Since the early 20th century, abstract art has formed a central stream of modern art. The artists who were the pioneers in Canada exploring abstraction often used nature-based subject matter. They took as images landscape, the body, and nature, filtered through methods we still think of today as abstracting—summarizing, subtracting, and stylizing. Relatively speaking, Canadians were late to abstraction. In Canada, Kathleen Munn was the first artist to exhibit abstract, Cubist-inspired paintings in 1923. Early women abstractionists were given little credit in early accounts of art history, and recent renewed interest in artists like Munn, Edna Taçon, and Marian Scott has worked to correct this oversight. Watch the Art Canada Institute preview video for their online book on Kathleen Munn to learn more:



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-4>*

A few years later, Bertram Brooker was the first Canadian artist to hold a solo exhibition of abstract work in 1927 in Toronto at the Arts and Letters Club. To his dismay, the works in view were not received well; especially hurtful were the reactions of his friends and supporters, J.E.H. MacDonald and Arthur Lismer, who could not understand his process and approach. Watch the Art Canada Institute preview video for their online book on Bertram Brooker to learn more:



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-5>*

Artists like Bertram Brooker and Kathleen Munn were influenced by the latest modern art trends happening in the US and Europe, and in their experiments in abstraction they, too, explored the process of separating qualities or attributes from the individual objects to which they belong. The forms these painters used were often blocky, solid, and three-dimensional; they used colour as an expression of mood, musical feeling, or ideas rather than a reflection of the natural world. Art historian Joyce Zemans observes that this “first generation of English-Canadian abstractionists came to maturity at a time when the nationalist discourse of the Group of Seven dominated Canadian art. Artists who chose a different path struggled for critical and institutional support” (2010, 163). Because of the difficulties of being certain of where and when abstract art began in Canada, and because, in Canada, abstract artists did not constitute a single movement, and because abstraction was a tentatively grasped idea that led to numerous strands of development, it is best to call the efforts of these



breakthrough artists individual approaches to abstraction. The first collective of abstract artists in Canada exploded onto the scene in Quebec in the 1940s with the Automatistes.

In 1946 artist Claude Gauvreau pronounced, “At last! Canadian painting exists.” He was referring to an exhibition of works by painter Paul-Émile Borduas and some of his disciples in Montreal. These artists came to be known as the Automatistes and would revolutionize art-making in Quebec, making works that could stand up to both New York and Paris (Nasgaard 53). The Automatistes were the first artists to embrace avant-garde gestural abstraction. Gathered under the leadership of Paul-Émile Borduas in the early 1940s, they were inspired by stream-of-consciousness writings of the time and approached their works through an exploration of the subconscious.

The Automatistes were united by their sympathies for European abstraction and outrage over Montreal’s pervasive cultural and political conservatism. The group comprised not just visual artists, but also included dancers, playwrights, poets, critics, and choreographers. Members included Marcel Barbeau, Marcelle Ferron, Roger Fauteux, Fernand Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Pierre Gauvreau, Louise Renaud, and Jean-Paul Riopelle.

The Automatistes’ leader, Paul-Émile Borduas, had originally aspired to be a church decorator, and apprenticed with one of the forefathers of Quebec art, Ozias Leduc, a distinguished painter who is best known for his extensive religious work in churches. Leduc encouraged Borduas to go to Paris in 1928 to study art with Maurice Denis, a French artist who was devoted to reviving Catholic religious art by recasting its traditional iconography in a more contemporary language—not exactly the most progressive teacher when we consider some of the other radical avant-garde art movements going on in Europe. When Borduas returned to Quebec, there was little church decoration work to be found because of the onset of the Depression in 1929. Instead, he began teaching young children in the Catholic School Board in Montreal, dropping off of everyone’s radar. However, Borduas later recalled of this period that working with children re-established his feelings about art and helped him “unblock his creativity.” Children, he wrote, thus “opened wide for me the door to Surrealism and automatic writing” (Nasgaard 60). He emerged in 1937 to teach at the École du meuble in Montreal. There he joined the intellectual company of colleagues like the art historian Maurice Gagnon. In the early 1940s Borduas began to form strong relationships with his students and with other younger intellectuals, artists, writers, and dancers. Borduas and his followers, including Marcel Barbeau, Jean Paul Riopelle, Pierre Gauvreau, and Jean-Paul Mousseau, met in Borduas’s studio to discuss Marxism, surrealism and psychoanalysis, all subjects disapproved of by the church. Together the group discussed art, life, and politics, and began to reject the Catholic Church, which maintained a firm grip on francophone life and culture.



Figure 9.13 Paul-Émile Borduas, *Abstraction verte*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 26 x 36 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, purchase, grant from the Government of Canada under the terms of the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, and Harry W. Thorpe Bequest. Photo MMFA, Brian Merrett.

Preeminent Borduas scholar François-Marc Gagnon writes of the artist's early foray into abstraction,

*[Borduas's] style was still figurative [in the late 1930s] and betrayed the influences of his Parisian masters, James W. Morrice and finally also Cézanne and Rouault. His discovery of the Surrealist movement and his reading of "Château étoilé" by André Breton (a text Borduas read in the review Minotaure and which eventually would become chapter 5 in Breton's L'Amour fou) were decisive for his further career.*

*In this chapter Breton cited Leonardo da Vinci's famous advice to his students to carefully look at an old wall until shapes and forms appear in its cracks and stains—shapes that the painter will only have to copy afterwards. This inspired Borduas to consider the piece of paper or the canvas on which he wanted to paint as a kind of psychic screen. By haphazardly tracing a few strokes, that is "automatically" and without any preconceived ideas, Borduas recreated Leonardo's "old wall." In this way he would only have to discover and refine arrangements in the drawing and, at a second stage, set them apart from the background by colour.*

*The art of pictorial automatism was born. Borduas's first automatist painting, if we are to believe him, was *Abstraction verte* in 1941. In 1942 he exhibited 45 "surrealist works" in gouache at the Théâtre de l'Ermitage in Montréal. This exhibition was a profound success. The year after, he attempted to*

*transfer to oil the effects he had obtained in his gouaches, but not, however, without introducing important changes. To the dichotomy of drawing and colour which he had explored in the gouaches, he introduced the contrast of figure and ground.* (Gagnon 2008)

Fernand Leduc had a central role in the development of ideas of the Automatistes between 1943-47. He was the first to suggest that the grouping of artists, writers, and dancers form a group and the first to propose they come up with a collective manifesto. The first time they were referred to as the Automatistes was in 1947, at an exhibition held in the apartment of the Gauvreau brothers, Claude and Pierre. Tancred Martin reviewed the show and, inspired by Borduas's *Sous le vent de l'île* or 1.47 (1947), he coined the group's name.

VIEW PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS'S *LEEWARD OF THE ISLAND OR 1.47* HERE

Figure 9.14 Paul-Émile Borduas, *Leeward of the Island or 1.47* (*Sous le vent de l'île ou 1.47*), 1947. Oil on canvas, 114.7 x 147.7 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

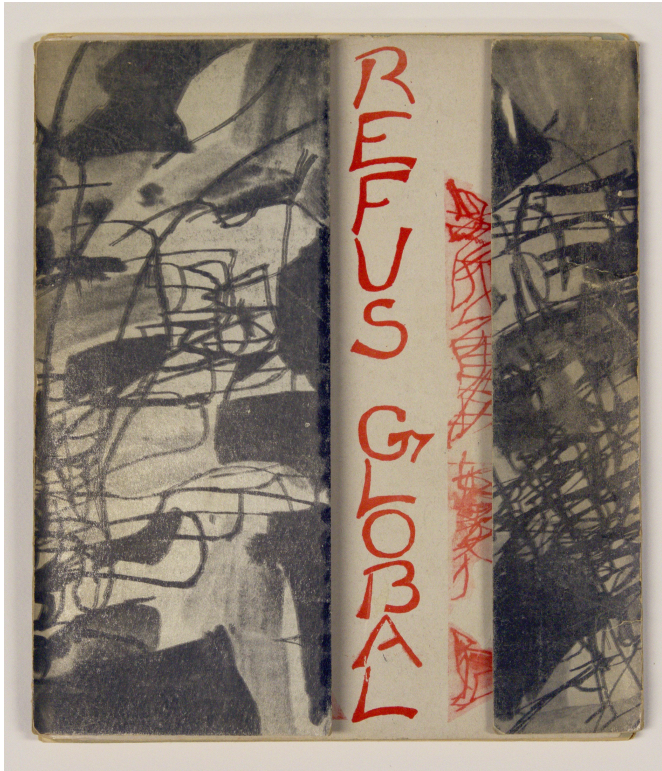
READ Brian Foss's object story essay on Borduas' *Sous le vent de l'île*, in which he argues that the painting can be seen productively as a socio-political document as much as an ambitious work of fine art. *Sous le vent de l'île* is one of the earliest and most accomplished visual statements of the radical changes defining French Quebec between the mid-1940s and the Quiet Revolution of the early 1960s. Its automatist technique, its semi-abstract character, and its surrealist-inspired philosophy all became basic to French Quebec's desire to overthrow the socio-political conservatism of "la grande noirceur" in favour of a society premised on individual freedom and creativity.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.6

The Automatistes shared a collective approach to art-making that emphasized a creative process without preconception. They believed that artists should draw what comes naturally to them and then give the work of art a title after it is completed. Using any art materials you have on hand—paper, canvas, paint, pencil, pencil crayon—attempt to create an artwork using the automatism technique, using Borduas's method of drawing "what the mind sees." Free your mind and let the image dictate where it goes. Once you feel it is completed, reflect on the experience of making your artwork.

Looking at your artwork, what do you think it represents? What did you like or dislike about this exercise and why? What was challenging and why? Why do you think artists were interested in creating art "without preconception"?





*Refus Global (cover), 1948. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 18.5 cm. Canadian Museum of History, RARE N 6546 Q8 R44 1948, IMG2009-0063-0111, Gatineau. Fair dealing copyright Canada.*

One of the most important legacies of the Automatistes was their manifesto, *Refus Global*. *Refus Global*, or “total refusal” in English, was a manifesto, written by the painter Paul-Émile Borduas and signed by 15 members of the Automatistes. It included texts by Bruno Cormier (later a psychoanalyst), poet Claude Gauvreau, painter Fernand Leduc and Françoise Sullivan (then a dancer). The manifesto was illustrated by Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Marcelle Ferron-Hamelin, Pierre Gauvreau, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Jean Paul Riopelle et Maurice Perron, a photographer. Other signatories also included Thérèse Renaud, Madeleine Arbour, Françoise Riopelle, Muriel Guibault et Louise Renaud. It was launched at the Librairie Tranquille in Montreal on 9 August 1948.

The passionately written rallying cry advocated a need for not just liberation but “resplendent anarchy,” vehemently challenging the traditional values of Quebec. One of its iconic lines was: “To hell with the holy-water-sprinkler and the tuque!” It also anticipated the coming of a “new collective hope.”

The Automatistes were directing their anger at the oppressive nationalism defined by the province’s

premier, Maurice Duplessis. The 15-year period that his government was in power became known as “La grande noirceur” (the Great Darkness). Duplessis’s conservative Union Nationale party favoured private businesses and gave overwhelming control of both education and health care to the Catholic Church. It is also clear from its text that the signatories of *Refus Global* railed against the Catholic Church, which was at the time very fundamentalist, defensive, and moralizing in terms of the French language and repressive customs and habits which lingered still.

Their manifesto claimed:

*... The fatal disintegration of our collective moral strength into strictly individual and sentimental power has undermined the once formidable shield of abstract knowledge behind which society takes cover to enjoy its ill-gotten gains at leisure.*

*It took the last two wars to achieve this absurd result. The horror of the third war will be decisive. We are on the brink of a D-day of total sacrifice.*

*The rats are already fleeing a sinking Europe by crossing the Atlantic. However, events will eventually overtake the greedy, the gluttonous, the sybarites, the unperturbed, the blind and the deaf.*

*They will be mercilessly swallowed up.*

*A new collective hope will dawn.*

*It is already demanding the passion of exceptional insights, anonymous union in renewed faith in the future, in the future collectivity. . .*

You can read the entire text of the anti-establishment manifesto, *Refus Global*, [here](#).

The effects of *Refus Global*, the Automatistes’ anti-establishment and anti-religious manifesto, rippled far and wide. It went on to become one of the most important and controversial artistic and social documents in modern Quebec society. The manifesto voiced the group’s desire for liberation and the ushering of a collective hope. The incendiary text caused an uproar in the media, leading to Borduas’s firing from his teaching job at

the École du Meuble. Borduas exiled himself, first to the United States, and then to France, where he died. Refus global helped trigger the Quiet Revolution to come.

Watch this CBC News video about the ripple effects of *Refus Global*: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1818456538>

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.7

A manifesto is a strongly worded written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of the author(s). What would your manifesto be? Draft a short manifesto about something you are passionate about.

Jean Paul Riopelle was another major figure of the Automatistes, a co-signer and cover designer of the manifesto; internationally, he is probably still the best known Quebecois artist. He studied at the École du Meuble, and while he achieved success in Montreal, it was his relationship with Paris that secured his reputation. He first visited Paris in 1946, and in 1947 he decided to settle there. He was included by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp in the last major group show of the Surrealist movement at the Galerie Maeght in 1947. His work of the 1940s and onward is characterized by a technique in which he squeezed paint directly from the tube onto the canvas, the paint's threads trailing across the surface so that they criss-cross in a number of directions. From around 1953 Riopelle used a palette-knife, which we can see below in *Pavane* (1954)—here, the whole surface of his work becomes a mosaic of compact and varied palette-knife strokes that wedged together to form contrasting chromatic zones and movements.



9.15 Jean Paul Riopelle, *Pavane*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 300 x 550 cm, National Gallery of Canada. Uploaded by Wikiart.

The National Gallery of Canada describes *Pavane* and Riopelle's style:

*Jean Paul Riopelle was one of the most ambitious artists of the group "Les Automatistes". The artist applied paint directly to the surface of the canvas using a palette knife, blending each mark in a free, abstract and automatic gesture. Space is created by the relationships of colours as they intersect or lay in close proximity to each other. This creates an animated surface, with some colours receding and some dancing forward. This monumental triptych was first exhibited in Canada in 1963 as part of the artist's retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada, and its title refers to a Spanish dance that originated in the 16th century. The dance incorporates a stately and processional rhythm, which is captured in the energy and movement of this painting.* (National Gallery of Canada, n.d.)

Watch this CBC clip from 1965 about Riopelle and his approach to painting:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=140#oembed-6>

The coming years brought Riopelle increasing success and immersion in the Parisian cultural scene. He spent his evenings in Paris bistros with friends, including playwright Samuel Beckett and artist Alberto Giacometti. In the 1960s, Riopelle renewed his ties to Canada. He had exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada (1963), and the Musée du Québec held a retrospective of Riopelle's work in 1967. In the early 1970s, he built a home and studio in the Laurentians in Québec and divided his time between France and Québec.

One of the most important legacies of Riopelle, Borduas, and the Automatistes was their anti-establishment and anti-religious manifesto, *Refus global*. It went on to become one of the most important and controversial



artistic and social documents in modern Quebec society. The manifesto voiced the group's desire for liberation and the ushering of a collective hope. The incendiary text caused an uproar, and Borduas exiled himself, first to the United States and then to France. *Refus global* helped trigger the Quiet Revolution to come.

A number of other artist collectives and groups emerged on the heels of The Automatistes. The Painters Eleven formed after a number of its members exhibited in a show at Simpson's Department Store in Toronto, entitled Abstracts at Home. The Painters Eleven—Jack Bush, Oscar Cahén, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, Ray Mead, Kazuo Nakamura, William Ronald, Jock Macdonald, Harold Town, Walter Yarwood, and Hortense Gordon—introduced the kind of abstraction happening in New York to Canadian viewers.

Around the same time in Quebec, a second avant-garde formed. Les Plasticiens were Jauran (Rodolphe de Repentigny), Louis Belzile, Jean-Paul Jérôme, and Fernand Toupin, followed by Guido Molinari, Claude Tousignant, Yves Gaucher and Charles Gagnon. These painters made a decisive impact on art through their explorations of geometric abstraction developed both in Paris and in New York.

Artistic collaboration and collectivity continue to inform the work of many contemporary artists working in Canada today. The desire for artistic collectivity and collaboration has persisted into the late 20th and 21st centuries. There are numerous examples of groups and collectives in Canada like General Idea, Condé + Beveridge, Feminist Art Collective, FASTWÜRMS, Tennis Club, PA System, Neon Kohkom, 44.4 Mothers/Artists Collective, ReMatriate Collective, and Life of a Craphead, for example.

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You can read more about contemporary art collectives in Canada in Alison Cooley and Daniella Sanader's essay in *Canadian Art*, "Gang Up: 16 Great Canadian Art Collaborations."

There are a number of Indigenous art collectives working in Canada today. OCICIWAN Contemporary Art Collective in the region of Edmonton supports Indigenous contemporary art, experimental creative practices, and innovative research. In Saskatchewan, Sâkêwêwak has been supporting Indigenous artists in the Regina area for more than two decades. The collective provides support to artists helping them to create, grow, and reach audiences. They hold an annual Storytellers Festival, as well as residencies, workshops, exhibitions, and performances.

Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTec) is another Indigenous collaboration and the brainchild of new media artist Skawennati Fragnito (Mohawk) and Jason Lewis (Cherokee), a digital media poet, artist, and software designer. AbTec "is an Aboriginally determined research-creation network whose goal is to ensure Indigenous presence in the web pages, online environments, video games, and virtual worlds that comprise cyberspace" (AbTec, n.d.). Their projects have included artworks, writing, lectures, workshops, residencies, and exhibitions. AbTec began with a project called CyberPowWow, a cutting edge online gallery and chat space for contemporary Indigenous art. Lewis and Skawennati fervently believe that cyberspace and virtual worlds should be (and need to be) self-determined places for Indigenous peoples to call home. These tenets also underpin much of Skawennati's artworks.

## Skawennati, *TimeTraveller*<sup>TM</sup>

Cyberspace and the internet have the ability to build community and collectivity. Skawennati and Jason Lewis contend that cyberspace may be one of the remaining territories not impacted fully by the histories and claims of colonialism. They write:

*Cyberspace—the websites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, virtual environments, and games that make up*



the internet—offers Aboriginal communities an unprecedented opportunity to assert control over how we represent ourselves to each other and to non-Aboriginals.

[...]

History has shown us that new media technologies can play a critical role in shaping how Western, technologically oriented cultures perceive Aboriginals. The camera, for instance, taught people that we all wore headdresses and lived in teepees. Cinema claimed that we spoke in broken English—if we spoke at all. The World Wide Web has offered us the possibility to shape our own representations and make them known. Traditional mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and film are expensive to produce and distribute and consequently exclude Aboriginal peoples. On the internet, we can publish for a fraction of the cost of doing so in the old media; we can instantly update what we publish in order to respond to misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and misreadings; and we can instantly propagate our message across a world-spanning network. And we don't need to fight through any gatekeepers to do so (Lewis and Skawennati 2005).

Skawennati's *TimeTraveller™* is a multiplatform project that includes a website, a nine-episode machinima series, a set of digital prints, and a prototype action figure. *TimeTraveller™* tells the story of Hunter, an angry young Mohawk man living in the 22nd century. Hunter is disillusioned with his life in an overcrowded, hyperconsumerist, technologized world where his traditional skills as hunter, warrior, and ironworker don't seem to be enough to get him by. He decides to use his edutainment system—his *TimeTraveller™*—to embark on a technologically enhanced vision quest that immerses him in historical events significant to First Nations, such as the Dakota Sioux Uprising, the Oka Crisis and the occupation of Alcatraz Island. Watch *TimeTraveller™* Episode 01 here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=140#oembed-7>

David Gaertner, Professor in the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program at the University of British Columbia, writes of *TimeTraveller™*:

*TimeTraveller™ is a love story. It's a piece of science fiction. It's a history of colonialism and Indigenous resistance. But of all these things TimeTraveller™ is a story about media and remediation. This is not to say that this work is more of an aesthetic than political piece. It is to say, however, that the import of Skawennati's politics is realized through the refashioning of "old media" in the new.*

[...]

In Episode 01 Hunter sets his VR headset to travel back in time to Fort Calgary, Canada. The year is 1875 A.D. He arrives just as a group of colonialists are finding their seats: "It looks like there's going to be a show," Hunter remarks. Indeed, in his engagement with his own "new media," the *TimeTraveller™*, Hunter inadvertently stumbles across the "new media" of the nineteenth century, a moving panorama.

One hundred and fifty years ago the moving panorama was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the world. Hundreds toured Europe, the United States, and Canada. Moving panoramas were composed of a series of contiguous scenes that scrolled past an audience behind a proscenium, which hid the machinery and the person turning the crank. Kerosene lanterns illuminated the "moving pictures," while a "Delineator" narrated the story.

The moving panorama in *TimeTraveller™* contextualizes Hunter's VR and locates Skawennati's piece itself within a layered history of "new media." Skawennati imagines Hunter's interface via a medium as novel to the twenty-first century as the panorama was to the nineteenth: machinima, an animated

movie that uses computer or video game software to generate the characters and scenes. Then, through both her own medium, and the one she retroactively imagines for Hunter, Skawennati reimagines and refashions the 1863 Minnesota Massacre panorama in her own narrative.

[...]

Like *CyberPowWow* before it, *TimeTraveller™* enacts visual sovereignty in the way that it inscribes Indigenous politics, identities, voices, and perspectives into the present, past, and future of screen culture, a medium that has historically worked to efface Indigenous presence. In engaging the past *TimeTraveller™* re-positions Indigenous presence and future and imagines new spaces to create and share stories (Gaertner 2017).

*TimeTraveller™*, which was developed between 2008 and 2013, used the virtual world of Second Life as its platform, a cyberspace where users can create and activate avatars that is, by its very nature, a collective or communal space.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 9.8

Take some time to go through the website for the Initiative for Indigenous Futures, a program described as “a partnership of universities and community organizations dedicated to developing multiple visions of Indigenous peoples tomorrow in order to better understand where we need to go today.” How are digital- and cyber-spaces used to encourage Indigenous youth and Elders to envision their own future on their own terms? Choose one example of a workshop, project from the archive, residency, or symposium to illustrate your answer. Lastly, think about the ways that this example engages the idea of collectivity and collectivism.

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Brian Foss on Paul-Émile Borduas, *Sous le ven de l'île*, or 1.47 (1947)

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# LOCALITIES

## VIEW MAUD LEWIS'S *BLACK CAT AND KITTENS* HERE

Figure 10.1 Maud Lewis, *Black Cat and Kittens*, 1961

A fluffy black cat and two equally charming kittens stare out from the canvas in this Maud Lewis painting. They are surrounded by cheerful lavender, white, yellow, and red tulips. Above them two branches arch, laden with bright pink blossoms. The colours are whimsical, and the flat swaths of colour lack distinction between foreground and background, with the artist's signature, "M. Lewis," scrawled conspicuously on the green grass. Cats in various colours and combinations are a common subject in Lewis' work. Her simple, yet effective compositional techniques—for example, the economic use of brush strokes—create a strikingly graphic composition (Cronin 2021). Lewis painted hundreds of similar feline works with her iconic cats; she was a prolific painter and her artworks have been reproduced on everything from fridge magnets to umbrellas. Art historian Ray Cronin explains that the repetition of popular motifs, like cats, in Lewis's works tell a palatable regional narrative about Nova Scotia's idealized folk past (Cronin 2021).

Maud Lewis met her husband Everett by unexpectedly showing up at his doorstep in response to an advertisement he had posted; he had wanted to hire a housekeeper. Several weeks later, in 1938, they were married. They moved into Everett's one-room house, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Lewis began selling hand-drawn and hand-painted Christmas cards that proved popular with her husband's customers as he sold fish door to door near Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. She was encouraged to keep painting, often using bright colours to draw the objects from the world around her, including flowers, oxen teams, horses, birds, deer, and cats. Now considered one of Nova Scotia's most beloved artists, Maud Lewis's biography has been heavily romanticized; scholars have often positioned her as an "outsider" artist, both in terms of her rural location and lack of formal training.

Watch the short NFB documentary, *Maud Lewis: A World without Shadows* (1976, 10mins) here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-9>

Her endearing story and choice of subject matter have made her an important figure in the history of art in Nova Scotia. In her lifetime, her paintings sold for five or ten dollars apiece, but they now sell for tens of thousands of dollars. She is so treasured by Nova Scotians that a large collection of her work, including the one-room house she shared with Everett, is now permanently displayed in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. After Lewis's death in 1970 and her husband's in 1979, the government of Nova Scotia bought the house and placed it in the care of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Look at and explore the Maud Lewis installation at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. As the website explains:

*After the death of Maud Lewis in 1970, and subsequently of her husband, Everett Lewis, in 1979, their lovingly painted home began to deteriorate. In reaction, a group of concerned citizens from*

*the Digby area started the Maud Lewis Painted House Society; their only goal was to save this valued landmark.*

*After a number of years of fundraising, the society realized that the project was going to take more resources than they could gather. In 1984, the house was sold to the Province of Nova Scotia and turned over to the care of Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.*

*In 1996, with funds from the federal Department of Canadian Heritage and from private individuals, the processes of conservation and restoration began. The final, fully restored house is on permanent display in Halifax at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.*

Look at the Virtual Tour of Lewis' fully restored house. What strikes you about it? What is your reaction to the paintings inside the house?

Though Lewis is best known for her small paintings on board, the tiny one-room house she shared with Everett for thirty-two years is perhaps her greatest work. She decorated every available surface, inside and out, from bread boxes and trays, to the walls, windows and doors. It's not typical to find these types of works—often referred to as folk art—in major public art institutions, nor is it common to see folk art like this written into dominant histories of art. Typically, artists who produce folk art are self-taught; tend to make art as a hobby, not as a career; don't follow traditional or trending modes, styles, or conventions within their art practice; and are interested in making art that tells stories about their direct life and community.

Art historian Erin Morton describes the reasons that folk art is typically left out of fine art narratives and institutions in her book *For Folk's Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. She points to the important role of the local as both generating art and shaping art's role in visual histories.

*The place of folk art in Nova Scotia during the second half of the twentieth century was deeply connected to notions of its existence as a historical, and traditional, material object category there. This book is about the process through which folk art became institutionalized in Nova Scotia during this period in ways that were important to the ongoing historicizing of the province's cultural identity, and the ideological apparatus that has determined which material objects fall in and out of this category amidst economic, social, and political debates over its boundaries.*

*There is certainly a well-established connection between the development of Nova Scotia's tourism industry and the use of folklore in branding an antimodern cultural identity, thanks to generations of mainstream cultural selectors who classified the province's homespun material culture and everyday stories and songs as "folk" during the first part of the twentieth century.*

Morton continues:

*My study shows that folk art's particular rise as an aesthetic category worthy of collection and display in fine arts institutions—and, indeed, the development of these very institutions in Nova Scotia—is not well understood despite its connection to a transnational cultural landscape of Euro-American folklore that McKay first identified twenty years ago. Part of the reason for this is that art institutions apply the label folk art to works produced in non-art-world settings. In other words, folk art as a concept does not exist without a museum curator or a university intellectual defining it as such. (Morton 2016, 3-4)*



In *For Folk's Sake*, Erin Morton remarks that “Lewis’s reputation grew far beyond her local community. This renown came thanks to the assistance of such public history makers as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), the popular press, and, eventually, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. These explored her everyday life and art making in radio and TV broadcasts, film, newspaper and magazine articles, and exhibitions. In the words of one writer, recognition of Lewis’s work grew quickly because public attention focused on her as “a rural, isolated, poverty stricken, handicapped, female folk artist—the ultimate marginalized outsider,” turning her into a marketable hero-figure in the face of adversity” (Morton 2016, 176).

Watch the trailer for the 2017 film *Maudie*, which features two Oscar-nominated actors and was widely circulated at festivals. How does this film compare to the NFB film *Maud Lewis: A World Without Shadows* in its treatment of Maud Lewis and of place? How does each portray Nova Scotia? How do they connect the work of Lewis to community and people?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=599#oembed-10>

## By the end of this module you will be able to:

- explain the concepts of centre, periphery, and regionalism and how they have been implicated in the way the artistic canon has been constructed
- describe the characteristics of and artists associated with Magic Realism
- discuss the significance of London Regionalism, the Emma Lake Workshops, and The Regina Five in terms of regional artistic production
- analyze the various forms of artistic activity in places like NSCAD, Vancouver, and Winnipeg.

## It should take you:

**Maud Lewis** Text 13 min, Video 12 min

**Centre-Periphery** Text 6 min

**Magic realism in the Maritimes** Text 16 min, Video 9 min 30s

**The Emma Lake workshops** Text 10 min

**All eyes on Halifax: NSCAD** Text 10 min, Video 9 min

**London (Ontario) calling** Text 15 min, Video 4 min

**Vancouver School** Text 32 min, Video 8 min  
**Winnipeg Gothic** Text 14 min, Video 6 min  
**Qaumajuq in Winnipeg** Text 6 min, Video 26 min  
**Race, space, and place** Text 13 min, Video 5 min  
**Learning journals** 8 x 20 mins = 160 mins  
**Total: ~ 6.5 hrs.**

## Key works:

Fig. 10.1 Maud Lewis, *Black Cat and Kittens* (1961)

Fig. 10.2 Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island* (1965)

Fig. 10.3 Mary Pratt, *Red Currant Jelly* (1972)

Fig. 10.4 Marion Nicoll, *Bowness Road, 2 a.m.* (1963)

Fig. 10.5 Roy Kiyooka, *Emma Lake* (1958)

Fig. 10.6 Garry Neill Kennedy, *An American History Painting (The Complete List of Pittsburgh Paints Historic Colour Series)* (1996)

Fig. 10.7 Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* (1969–1971)

Fig. 10.8 Greg Curnoe, *Doubtful Insight* (1987)

Fig. 10.9 Ian Wallace, *Lookout* (1979)

Fig. 10.10 Jeff Wall, *Landscape Manual* (1969)

Fig. 10.11 Jeff Wall, *Mimic* (1982)

Fig. 10.12 Marcel Dzama, *Untitled* (2002)

Qaumajuq Inuit Art Centre in Winnipeg

Fig. 10.13 Zinnia Naqvi, *The Wanderers – Niagara's Falls, 1988* (2019) from the *Yours to Discover* series

Fig. 10.14 Shellie Zhang, *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*, 2018

## Centre-periphery

Canada, as we know, is rather large—it is difficult to create a single narrative of Canadian history when there is so little in common from east to west and north to south. The idea of regionalism has been used, particularly within settler understandings of place, to help reconcile the large and diverse geographical areas and populations within Canada. Regionalism proposes an interest in the distinctive local character of a specific geographic area. Regional identities are strikingly different among provinces and territories, as well as *within* these places. Regional identities and differences, as well as the actual size of Canada's bigger cities (Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver) have contributed to the centre-periphery divide in the artworld and in the writing of Canadian art history.

The “centre” of centre-periphery relations are those bigger cities today with artists, curators, and institutions that participate in the international art scene. In contrast, the “periphery” is everything else, namely the prairies, the maritimes, and the north and cities like Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver. Addressing the centres and peripheries within Canada means considering the complex matrix of power relations, situated knowledges, economic dependencies, and geographic considerations that, for example, place Regina on the periphery of art scenes still often seen as centred in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Because of the vast geographic distances between cities in Canada, artists have had for centuries to band together, to form collectives, to collaborate to create art scenes and find exhibition spaces, and to work together to achieve visibility. As scholar and co-publisher of the web journal OnCurating, Ronald Kolb writes,

*Referring to the Centre-Periphery (or the Core-Periphery) model, one must be aware of its origins in economics: Centre-Periphery basically describes an (unequal) relationship between places. It is used as a spatial description of a relation between a so-called “advanced” (or dominating) place and its allegedly “lesser developed” (or serving) periphery. In this model, the centre is the place of power (of law, of trade, of military force) and is a door to the rest of the world. The periphery is a remote, rural place, and it delivers raw materials, food, and other resources to the centre under the condition of exploitation. The centre provides goods and “superior” products (Kolb, Regli, and Richter 2019, 3).*

The centre-periphery model is a long-established method of understanding settler-colonial Canada, particularly as a resource economy, under the banner of the Metropolitan-Hinterland Thesis. This thesis is primarily based on J.M.S. Careless’ now-widely quoted 1954 essay, “Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History,” which was built upon Harold Innis’s 1930 book *The Fur Trade in Canada*. According to this thesis, the Western Canadian provinces (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan) are a hinterland to the political and economic forces of central Canada (Ontario and Quebec). The effect of the centre-periphery model on traditional narratives of art has not necessarily accounted for the flourishing of art and art scenes in locations and communities outside Canada’s bigger metropolises. Professor of English and Creative Writing Douglas Reichert Powell describes critical regionalism as a “deliberate use of region as a way to envision and critique relationships among people and places and envision better alternatives” (2007, 10). In this section, we jump from place to place to examine some of those so-called “peripheries,” not as marginalized or peripheral to the main story, but as challenges to it; places where critical regionalism can push against globalization as homogenization. And in some places, regionalism is about artists and artworks that indicate a flourishing of local histories, people, and ideas.

## Magical Realism in the Maritimes

In his essay “Here & there, now & again regions end where countries begin” (note the play of regional accent on “again” or again) John Murchie points out that:

*There is no comprehensive history of the visual arts in Atlantic Canada. Historically speaking, this geopolitical space, carved out of a continent once referred to as the ‘new world’ is a dead site, its newness long past; that past is also lost to memory, forgotten as though it did not exist, or having existed, it did not matter (Murchie 1997, 16).*

He acknowledges that the only element of Atlantic Canada’s art history to make it into the the National Gallery of Canada and into the narrative of a broader Canadian art history was a movement called Magic Realism. Magic Realism is a form of painting that typically makes use of accurate detail that is smooth to the point of having photographic clarity. Magic Realism occupies a place between Surrealism and Photorealism; subjects are rendered with a photographic naturalism, but where the use of flat tones, ambiguous and odd perspectives, and strange juxtapositions suggest an imagined or dreamed reality. The term magic realism is often associated with a style of literature in mid-20th century Latin America, but the term was actually coined by artist and critic Franz Roh in his 1925 book *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus*, which describes an artistic style derived from *Neue Sachlichkeit* that shifted from expressionism to a more realistic visual language and unsettling imagery. In Canada, Alex Colville is one of the leading figures associated with Magic Realism. Colville was an iconic Atlantic Canadian painter who spent the majority of his life working and living in the Maritimes. Magic realism is typified by an approach that infuses symbolism in everyday scenes as well as a magical, sometimes upsetting, surreal quality.

VIEW ALEX COLVILLE’S *TO PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND* HERE

Figure 10.2 Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island* (1965)

The movement flourished at one of the many small liberal-arts universities that dot the Maritimes. Alex Colville attended Mount Allison University from 1938 to 1942 and, after serving as a war artist in the Second World War, he returned to Mount Allison where he was a professor from 1946 to 1963. Colville chose his subject

matter from his immediate environment: his family, the animals he kept, and the open windy landscape near his home. His representations, however, are never simply a recording of the everyday. Instead, they are highly representational reflections of a world which is at once filled with the joyful and the beautiful, the disturbing and the dangerous. *To Prince Edward Island* reveals a number of themes that recur in Colville's work: transportation, the sea, and the relationships between the people represented (the woman and the partly obscured man behind her) and the viewer themselves. The woman with the binoculars illustrates the power inherent in a gaze, the dynamic that exists between the person looking and the person being looked at, who in turn is looking back at the gazer. Colville's works are meticulously calculated and constructed, following a long and careful process for each composition that involves taking precise measurements and proportioning these to an underlying geometric scheme.

If we consider the art movements occurring across Canada in the 1960s, when Colville painted *To Prince Edward Island*—movements such as abstraction and conceptual art—Murchie's considerations of art history and Atlantic Canada are resonant. Colville was not working within dominant schools or approaches to art in Canada, nor was he located in a geographic center in which these forms of art were thriving. It is difficult to fit Colville into major narratives of art. This does not mean, however, that Colville's impact on artistic production and the movement of Magic Realism was not significant. Colville shaped the next generation of student painters, particularly in his role as an instructor at Mount Allison.

Colville and Magic Realism influenced a generation of students and artists located in Atlantic Canada. John Murchie suggests that, of all of the art production from the region in this moment, and for all that Magic Realism was "difficult to digest" in the narrative of Canadian art, the movement was so significant that art institutions had no choice but to find a way to fit the movement into the story:

*I characterised the public recognition of Atlantic Canadian visual art with the hyperbolic equation Atlantic Canada + art = Colville. [...] Alex Colville was identified as the representative of what had value in the visual culture of Atlantic Canada. [...] All one must do is look at any survey or representation of contemporary art in Canada by the National Gallery during the 1950s and 1960s, and Alex Colville's production will be present as the pre-eminent, and more often than not, the only example of art in the Atlantic region* (Murchie 1997, 20-21).

Both Christopher Pratt and Mary Pratt were students of Colville who took up the stylistic qualities of Magic Realism in their own practices. Through his work, Christopher Pratt presents his vision of Newfoundland and urges us to consider how progress and the modern world are transforming the island.

Watch the trailer for *Immaculate Memories*, a 2018 documentary on the work of Christopher Pratt here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-1>

Pratt's paintings are largely the products of his imagination, yet they are infused with memories of people, places and events that have been filtered and clarified through his search for order and simplicity. Like Colville's process, his paintings are very carefully organized and precisely executed. Everything inessential is eliminated from the work.



Figure 10.3 Mary Pratt, *Red Currant Jelly*, 1972. Oil on masonite, 45.9 x 45.6 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Uploaded by Wikiart.

The darkness that lies just below the surface of the quotidian, of the everyday, is a central theme in the work of Mary Pratt. Home life, daily rituals, the wrapping, preserving and presentation of food—this is the stuff of Mary Pratt’s realist paintings. Pratt grew up in Fredericton and in 1953 she studied at the School of Fine Arts of Mount Allison University in Sackville, Nova Scotia, where Alex Colville was a faculty member. A few years later, Pratt moved with her then-husband, Christopher Pratt, to a small town in Newfoundland. She spent most of her twenties supporting her husband and did not begin to paint again until she was almost thirty in the early 1960s.

As writer Lisa Moore has noted, “Pratt’s life in small-town Newfoundland was replete with domestic tasks, and the roles of mother and homemaker came to profoundly influence her painting” (“Slideshow,” 2013). Many scholars, including Moore, have pointed out Pratt’s truly remarkable handling of the “drama of light” which in some instances is juxtaposed with a darker side or meaning in her works. According to Moore, the light in Pratt’s “seems sentient, a living

thing, a pulsation or emission, imbuing the paintings with an erotic and almost mystical desire” (“Slideshow,” 2013).

Her experiments in light transform ordinary moments into charged theatrical scenes. What Pratt found, however, was that light changed faster than she could sketch or paint. She responded to this dilemma by using a camera to “still” the light and the moment. The photograph became a record of a potent visual experience that she could later interpret in her paintings. Her brand of realism is called Photorealism, to signal the use of photographs by painters as a means to reproduce their subjects with great precision in mediums such as painting, drawing and sculpture. Mary Pratt addressed the everyday objects of women’s domestic lives. By depicting her everyday domestic subjects close-up and in detail, they often suggest a larger symbolic meaning. Her choice of the domestic as subject, on objects and scenes connected to her role as mother and housewife, exemplify the 1970s feminist slogan “the personal is political,” although Pratt herself shied away from any explicit feminist statement in her painting.

As she so often did, Pratt was working away in her kitchen when she noticed the scene she captured in *Red Currant Jelly*. She was instantly struck by the sunlight shining through the jelly sitting on the windowsill. “It was afternoon and the window was facing east, she remembers, and the soft light reflected on the metal foil beneath the jelly” (Simpson 2020). Jellies and jams would become a recurring motif in her practice for decades. She took a photograph of the scene; she had only recently begun to use it as a tool or reference point in her painting. Another abiding theme that emerged with *Red Currant Jelly* is the use of red, a colour with symbolic meaning that runs through her oeuvre, seen in later jelly paintings, or in the blood and guts of her eviscerated chickens or butchered meat.

Watch National Gallery of Canada Curator Jonathan Shaughnessy and Mireille Eagan, Curator at The Rooms in St John’s, discuss *Red Currant Jelly* in the context of Pratt’s work:





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-2>

Alex Colville and Christopher and Mary Pratt were not interested in the art styles and movements that dominated the 1950s and 60s, abstraction chief among them. While the Painters Eleven and their Abstract Expressionism, the Automatistes and Regina Five explored the possibilities of non-objective art, in the Maritimes these artists staked a claim for realism—an Atlantic realism.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 10.2

Alex Colville's work has surpassed the local and, for many, has a universal appeal. His works have been particularly influential for filmmakers. Watch this clip of curator Andrew Hunter discussing his 2014 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario on the work of Alex Colville. In what ways do Colville's works transcend geography? Why might they be so appealing to writers and filmmakers?

## The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops and the Regina Five

A spirit of artistic ambition and rebellion with regard to abstraction developed in Regina, Saskatchewan in the 1950s. The attitude of abstraction captured the minds of a group of artists associated with the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery and the Regina College School of Art at the University of Saskatchewan. In 1961, Ronald Bloore, Director at the Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, curated *The May Show* at the Gallery. The exhibition featured the work of five young artists: Arthur McKay, Douglas Morton, Edward (Ted) Godwin, Kenneth Lochhead and Bloore himself. Everyone expected paintings of wheat fields, grain elevators and cows, but, "instead of the familiar legislative building in Regina and grain elevators and portraits of Mounties," a visitor to the Gallery "merely found 'abstract' paintings of senseless splashes of paint which didn't look like Regina or the prairies at all" (Verrall 81). *The May Show* impressed the curator of the National Gallery of Canada and that same year it was brought to Ottawa under the title *Five Painters from Regina*; hence, the moniker they are known by today: the Regina Five. This collective became a hub of avant-garde activity in the city of Regina, a group that also included poet and painter Roy Kiyooka and modernist architect Clifford Wiens.

Seminal to the development of the Regina Five were the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops in northern Saskatchewan (Emma Lake is near Prince Rupert). For more than four decades starting in 1955, the Emma Lake Workshops saw some of the most important gatherings in the nation's art history. For the Saskatchewan-based artists involved, the workshops were pivotal for their focus on the creation and advancement of a dynamic arts culture in the province and as a way for individual artists to overcome feelings of isolation from the Canadian art centres like Toronto and Montreal. The two-week-long August workshops set the country's visual culture in dramatic, new, modern directions, particularly in the Prairies and western Canada. The Murray Point Art School at Emma Lake, which ran as a summer school program from 1936 to 1955, was revived by Arthur McKay and Kenneth Lochhead as the Emma Lake Art Camp. Painters McKay and Lochhead invited contemporary artists

and thinkers from outside of Saskatchewan to work and exchange ideas with leading local talent. By bringing in significant critics and artists from the outside, they felt they could establish stronger contact with the art world at large, and in this way invigorate their own art. Every year, one artist or critic from outside of the province was invited to lead activities at the workshops, which were meant to introduce a wide-ranging group of Prairie artists to some of modernism's best-known practitioners and critics. The first Emma Lake workshop, held in August 1955, was led by B.C.-based artist Jack Shadbolt, and the very last one was held in the summer of 1995. In total, some eighty artists and critics came to Emma Lake, including some of modernism's best-known practitioners and critics: Barnett Newman (in 1959), New York art critic Clement Greenberg (in 1962), Jules Olitski (in 1964), and Donald Judd (in 1968).

Originally from Ottawa, Kenneth Lochhead was Director at the School of Art at Regina College and was the first coordinator of Emma Lake, and the workshops were critical to his own development as an artist. Writing to Lochhead in 1967, Greenberg commented, "You have no idea of how much I'm betting on Saskatchewan as N.Y.'s only competitor" (1979, 41).

VIEW MARION NICOLL'S *BOWNESS ROAD, 2 AM* HERE

*Figure 10.4 Marion Nicoll, Bowness Road, 2 am, 1963, Collection of Glenbow*

Of the women artists who attended the Emma Lake workshops, Marion Nicoll is one of the best-known. The artist had begun in 1947 to experiment with the kind of automatism techniques introduced by Jock Macdonald, with whom Nicoll taught at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary. In August 1957 at Emma Lake, Nicoll worked closely with American artist Will Barnet, who had a dramatic impact on her art making: her approach becoming much more flattened, somewhat geometric with hints of the organic and hard edge abstraction. In explaining her style, Nicoll stated:

*I hate a mushy line . . . an uncertain intermingling. . . . Painting for me is all on the picture plane, the actual surface of the canvas, with the power held in the horizontal and vertical movements of the expanding color shapes. There can be, for me, no overlapping transparencies or fuzzy edges – all these are a hangover from romantic, naturalistic painting. (Marion Nicoll, 1975, n.p.)*

In *Bowness Road, 2 am*, it is clear that Nicoll's exploration of abstraction is based on observable things in the world. The painting references her Calgary neighbourhood of Bowness; the earthy colours and abstract shapes give the viewer a feeling of space.

VIEW ROY KIYOOKA'S *EMMA LAKE* HERE

*Figure 10.5 Roy Kiyooka, Emma Lake, 1958, watercolour on wove paper, 37.8 x 55.5 cm, National Gallery of Canada*

Japanese-Canadian artist Roy Kiyooka was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and studied, like Nicoll, in Calgary. Kiyooka's brother recalled, "Outside of art school much of the socializing took place at the Nicolls' home in Bowness where artists/students met to argue about modern art/existentialism and the avant-garde in other centres—Les Plasticiens—Montreal—Abstract Expressionism—New York—London—Paris. Bowness was the Paris on the Bow for a short time" (Nasgaard 160). In the 1950s, Kiyooka was a teacher in Regina, working alongside Kenneth Lochhead. He participated in the August workshops many times, and his exceptional watercolour, *Emma Lake*, which you see here, references nature through experimentation in modernist abstraction. Kiyooka plays with patterns, and the juxtaposition of delicate watercolour brushwork may be inspired by the lake itself.



Select two artists who participated in the Emma Lake workshops, or two members of the Regina Five. Research their artistic production and compare and contrast two of their works. As part of your research, try to recreate, using any materials you have around you, the works you've selected, to get a sense of the artists' processes and methods.

## All eyes on Halifax: NSCAD

Conceptual art was a global movement that focused on local issues and concerns. In Canada there were three centers of conceptual art—Toronto, Vancouver, and Halifax—but it was Halifax that shaped the early Canadian conceptual art scene in the mid-1960s. As a hub for conceptual art, Halifax arose unexpectedly in 1967 with the decision of the Nova Scotia College of Art to hire Garry Neill Kennedy as president.

[VIEW GARRY NEILL KENNEDY'S AN AMERICAN HISTORY PAINTING HERE](#)

*Figure 10.6 Garry Neill Kennedy, An American History Painting (The Complete List of Pittsburgh Paints Historic Colour Series), 1996*

Garry Neill Kennedy's art practice was deeply rooted in conceptual art. Read about history and context of conceptual art on Smarthistory.

Kennedy brought together his own personal histories and outlook with the basic tenets of conceptual art. Often, Kennedy assigned himself a central task or question, such as “What is the average-size Canadian painting?”, “What is figure painting?”, or “What commercial paints include references to American history in their names?” Then, choosing his materials, he gave himself over to the process in an effort to address that task or question. The resulting artwork is the output of Kennedy's efforts. For example, for *An American History Painting*, he stacked, according to length, from floor to ceiling, the names of paint colours in a particular inventory in swatches of those colours. The shortest name in this work is “Gunstock,” which he also uses for the entire background of the piece. This was a coincidence that Kennedy appreciated as he remarks:

*It's an obelisk, and it lists all of these colours one on top of the other. I looked at the names of these colours and I stacked them—56 of them—starting with the bottom one, which is Smokey Mountain Blue and quite long, then the top one which is Gunstock and quite short. If you stack one on top of the other, you get this gradual pyramid. It looks like the Washington Monument. It's amazing. The military is endemic in this work: Soldier Green; Bunker Hill; Texas Star; Kitty Hawk; Fort Leavenworth. These words are interspersed on this mountain of colours and painted on the wall as you see it at the National Gallery—31 feet high. I was trying to say that the U.S.A. is a country of guns and money (NGC, 1997).*

In addition to a lengthy career as a practicing artist, Kennedy was also an adept administrator. He immediately set out to modernize and professionalize the Nova Scotia College of Art by upgrading the facilities; establishing an art gallery to provide a venue for exhibitions by students and faculty; changing the name to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD); and, most crucially, hiring a new faculty of artists that he had met during his time studying at art school in the United States. To cultivate a strong bond between NSCAD and New York artists and art institutions Kennedy invited established American artists to visit in order to give talks and install

exhibitions—people like John Baldessari, Sol LeWitt, and Claes Oldenburg. These visitors participated in two noteworthy initiatives: the Projects Class and the Lithography Workshop.

The Projects Class was a course run by David Askevold, a conceptual artist working in installations, video, film and photo-text works, sculpture and photography. Askevold selected notable conceptual artists and invited them to submit brief conceptual projects that he and his students would then carry out. For example, Sol LeWitt presented a “to do” list for the class that encouraged students to create:

1. a work that uses the idea of error
2. a work that uses the idea of incompleteness
3. a work that uses the idea of infinity.

Robert Smithson suggested a work that would involve mud being dumped over a cliff. Lawrence Weiner asked students to “remove” some unspecified thing halfway between the Equator and the North Pole. You can view all of the Projects Class assignments [here](#).

Visiting artists were also offered the opportunity to produce a limited-edition print with the help of a master printer in NSCAD’s lithography workshop. Typically, 50 prints were made of each work, and the copies split 50/50 between the artist and NSCAD, with the intention of generating sales. The lithography workshop produced more than 170 editions of prints by an impressive list of artists which includes Claes Oldenburg, Philip Pearlstein, Gene Davis, Vito Acconci, Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland, Guido Molinari, Sol LeWitt, Jack Chambers, Eric Fischl, and Les Levine.

Throughout the 1970s, the type of visitors to NSCAD broadened to include artists with a variety of approaches and attitudes, and a range of designers, critics, art historians, and art educators. NSCAD’s reputation as a hub of conceptual activity and as a point of connection for artists and students from across the global conceptual art scene soared within the international art community. While NSCAD became a veritable “who’s who” of minimalist and conceptual artists, even awarding an honorary doctorate to Andy Warhol in 1972, it was a bit of an enigma to much of the local Halifax community. As NSCAD professor Bruce Barber puts it, “conceptual art was one of the truly avant-garde art movements of the 20th century, hence the possibility for an institution away from the center, like NSCAD, to paradoxically become a centre” (Barber 2001). The lithography workshop brought numerous renowned artists to Halifax between 1969 and 1980, helping to establish NSCAD’s reputation as a hotbed for conceptual art—no small feat for a small regional art school in a small city on the rocky edge of North America (Mendritzki 202).

The lithography workshop at NSCAD was resuscitated in 2019. The Lithography Workshop: Contemporary Editions brought eight artists—Shuvinai Ashoona, Jordan Bennett, Shary Boyle, Brendan Fernandes, Amy Malbeuf, Ed Pien, Derek Sullivan and Ericka Walker—to NSCAD to work with Master Printer Jill Graham to create new print editions and re-establish the workshop. Watch an overview video of the relaunched Litho Workshop [here](#):



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-3>*

In this video, you get an in-depth view of artist Shary Boyle’s contribution to Contemporary Editions:

Develop a piece of conceptual art in the style of Askeveld's projects class. Write an idea or task and have two or three of your friends execute it and share their results with you. In choosing your friends, think about your own community and network of peers. How does it shape the ways in which they respond to your "Projects Class" task?

## London (Ontario) calling

Often overshadowed by Toronto, the seemingly-peripheral city of London, Ontario in the 1960s was home to a group of artists who decided to challenge and de-centre the centre-periphery model as it applied to art-making and exhibitionary practices. For the next twenty years, the city "drew the attention of the national and international art media for its energetic community of artists, filmmakers, novelists, poets, musicians, and activists who collectively became known as the London Regionalists, or more often and more simply, as the Regionalists" (Regimbal 2014).

Regionalism in London was the subject of articles in popular and art-specific magazines in the 1960s and 1970s, and of a major touring exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada in 1966. Despite its name, Regionalism developed a profile of international significance when many artists from London began showing across Canada and around the world, including at the São Paulo Biennial in 1969 and 1987.

Consider instead, Canadian novelist and poet George Bowering recalled, "I do remember the eager hubbub of those London, Ont. Regionalists, their homemade art galleries, ironic picnics, theatre workshops, their gladsome business. They *gathered*" (Regimbal 2014).



Figure 10.7 Greg Curnoe, *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series*, February 10, 1969–March 10, 1971. Oil, rubber stamp and ink, graphite, and wallpaper on plywood, in Plexiglas strip frame, with audiotape, tape player, loudspeakers, and eight-page text (photocopied from a rubber-stamped notebook), 243.8 x 487 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photograph: Drew Burton.

London artist Greg Curnoe was an artist-activist and worked primarily as a painter who also experimented with video, sculpture and photography. He was an ardent regionalist, and a key figure in the development of the art scene in 1960s London, Ontario, turning it into an important artistic centre. Rejecting the notion that an artist could thrive only in the big cities of Toronto or New York, he instead founded the Regionalism movement,

which celebrated everyday life and experience. Curnoe stated, “Provincialism is what people do when they live, as they think, ‘out in the sticks,’ and they try to imitate what they think is hip in the big centres. Regionalism is simply what people do when they are integrated people, when they are at ease with other people from other environments” (Bruce Kidd, 1973). In other words, Curnoe eschewed the need that many artists felt (and still feel) to emulate the art of bigger centres. He argued instead that you could be “at ease” in a smaller city and produce artwork just as worthy of exhibition and critique as that in New York or Paris.

Watch the video, “Greg Curnoe – You Have To Do Something” for an overview of Curnoe’s role in trying to make London, Ontario “happen” here:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-4>

Judith Rodger provides this overview of Curnoe’s contribution to London Regionalism:

*Greg Curnoe was, without question, at the centre of the art movement known as London Regionalism. In what he called the “backwater” of London, Ontario, Curnoe’s various studios were the gathering places for a group of artists who supported each other but developed distinct styles of their own. If they occasionally used the word “regionalism” to describe themselves, it was entirely without reference to other movements of the same name around the world. It was Curnoe’s desire to ground his art in authentic, local culture—his daily encounters with his surroundings—rather than in the latest international trend. As he wrote in 1963, “We are not using regionalism as a gimmick but rather as a collective noun to cover what so many painters, writers, and photographers have used—their own environment—something we don’t do in Canada very much” (Curnoe 1963, 9).*

*Later, after he had named both a magazine and a gallery “Region,” Curnoe explained that he had been unaware of 1930s American Regionalism: “The idea that London’s developing artistic community was an outgrowth of U.S. regionalism was totally inaccurate.” (Curnoe, 1983) What consolidated the group’s name in public consciousness was the National Gallery of Canada’s 1968 landmark Heart of London exhibition, which toured smaller cities across Canada with works by John Boyle (b. 1941), Jack Chambers (1931–1978), Greg Curnoe, Murray Favro (b. 1940), Bev Kelly (b. 1943), Ron Martin (b. 1943), David Rabinowitch (b. 1943), Royden Rabinowitch (b. 1943), Walter Redinger (1940–2014), Tony Urquhart (b. 1934), and Ed Zelenak (b. 1940) (Rodger 2016).*

Curnoe’s *View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series* is a true multimedia artwork, consisting of oil on wood as well as stamp and ink, wallpaper, a plexiglass frame, an audiotape and tape player, loudspeakers, and an eight-page printed text in a notebook. The book is a guide to the numbers you see painted on the image, which correspond to the various phenomena Curnoe saw and heard from this view of the hospital in London from the artist’s studio: weather conditions, light effects, birds, traffic, clouds floating by. The time and date are also noted in the book, while the tape recordings, which play on the speakers in the gallery space, are of noises Curnoe heard from his studio window. “The spectator is constantly led...to switch from one level to another to recreate through the spontaneous perception of the visual, textual, and acoustical elements, not only the scene in its details, but also the disorder of the events which occurred during the making of the work” (King 222). The viewer experiences the artwork on three levels at the same time—reading, looking, and listening. “The 120 items listed in the notebook provide a kind of guide to Greg Curnoe and, in so doing, the notebook becomes a form of non-linear biography” (King 222). It is also an artwork deeply grounded in the local, thus exemplifying the characteristics of the regionalism to which Curnoe devoted much of his life and career.

Another London, Ontario artist was Jack Chambers. He studied art in London and Mexico before enrolling at the University of Western Ontario. He left in 1953 for Europe, eventually spending time in Spain. This period had a great impact on his personal and artistic life. Chambers returned to Canada in 1961 and began working on his

ground-breaking film, *The Hart of London*. He founded the London Film Makers Co-op in 1967 to encourage the making and distribution of films. Like Curnoe, Chambers was a key player in the London Regionalism scene, an activist, fervent supporter and lobbyist for the rights of artists. In 1969 Chambers was diagnosed with leukemia and given only months to live; however, he went on to battle the illness for nine years. During that time, he won numerous awards and accolades, and set record sale prices for a living artist in Canada. Chambers also took up Victoria Hospital as a subject in a work that is quite different from Curnoe's.

Read about Jack Chamber's painting *Victoria Hospital* (1969-70) here.

#### VIEW GREG CURNOE'S *DOUBTFUL INSIGHT* HERE

*Figure 10.8 Greg Curnoe, Doubtful Insight, March 23, 1987, (Catalogued as What If Daily Life in Canada Is Boring?), Gouache, watercolour, stamp pad ink, pastel on wove paper, 117.8 x 190.5 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 10.5

Curnoe's oeuvre also demonstrates a real interest in how language could be explored through visual art. From an early age, he experimented with rubber stamps, his cousin's printing press, and even the date stamps from his father's office. Later, words became the focus of many of his works. Curnoe is also well known for his small-edition artist books. This artwork reads, "What if daily life in Canada is boring?? & what if I am not aware of what is interesting to others about my life??" These phrases represent Curnoe's investigation of Canadian identity, but more importantly they point to his regional or personal interests and suggest how his regionalism connects to Canadian identity more broadly. Reflect on this artwork and ask yourself the following: What does regionalism mean to you? Do you agree with Curnoe that Canadian identity is regional (based in cities, towns, or other smaller areas), or do you think it is national (based on being Canadian as a whole)? Why?

## The Vancouver School

NSCAD saw a flourishing of conceptual activity on Canada's East Coast. On the West Coast, Vancouver saw a very different form of conceptual activity taking place based on a very specific set of local conditions. As curator Melanie O'Brian asserts in her book *Vancouver Art & Economies*,

*Since the mid-1980s, the once-marginal city of Vancouver has developed within a globalized economy and become an internationally recognized centre for contemporary visual art. Vancouver's status is due not only to a thriving worldwide cultural community that has turned to examine the so-called periphery, but to the city's growth, its artists, expanding institutions, and a strong history of introspection and critical assessment. As a result, Vancouver art is visible and often understood as distinct and definable (O'Brian 2007, back copy).*

Expo '86 catalyzed a boom in developments in the city, such as a new downtown trade and convention centre

and a rapid transit system, that raised public expectation of the city and what it could be. It also marked a moment in which Vancouver's economy became increasingly privatized. This shift affected the social and cultural fabric of Vancouver, very quickly making the city increasingly unaffordable for artists and artist-run centres, and public funding for arts and culture less available.

The Vancouver School or Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism began to be applied to a number of artists in Vancouver around 1990 and always includes Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham, Christos Dikeakos, Ken Lum and sometimes Roy Arden and Stan Douglas, though some in this list may be reluctant to identify themselves with the term photoconceptualism. Conceptual photography, or Photoconceptualism, is a type of photography that illustrates an idea. Often it is a type of photography that is staged to represent an idea. The term "Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism" often refers to a common critical sensibility towards photography, rather than a unified aesthetic or formal attributes. While a number of the photoconceptualist artists also make video and sculpture, the Vancouver School as a contemporary brand is forever linked with Jeff Wall's pioneering use of photographic transparencies: large hyper-realistic photographs that compete with the size and stature of historical paintings found in museums, mounted in shallow boxes and illuminated from behind (Modigliani 2018, 2).

The name "Vancouver School" comes from an essay published in 1990 by Ian Wallace entitled "Photoconceptual Art in Vancouver" in which he outlined the development of Vancouver photoconceptualism as emerging from the intellectual and text-based practices of conceptual art and the late-modernist aesthetics of abstract painting and Minimalism, which Wallace said he and others adopted along with a "postmodern" dose of skepticism towards the modernism that still dominated much of the art world.

This skepticism and criticality was enabled by Vancouver's marginal or peripheral position in terms of the global art world. It had no significant art market for artists to aspire to during the 1960s and 70s, and so Vancouver artists were deeply engaged with regional themes and images while experimenting in a plurality of media. Vancouver has, over the years, fostered a highly developed intellectual climate that has made the city conducive to an amalgamation of particularly advanced art practices. The work of the Vancouver School launched Vancouver into the international art market; today "Vancouver" has become almost a brand name, denoting such artistic qualities as intellectual rigour, stringent conceptual refinement and precision, and most of all a deeply critical commitment towards the politics of the image and image production in particular. Vancouver's rise in the international art world in many ways occurred because of its insular location at the edge of the world. Why a tradition of unparalleled artistic intellectualism has originated precisely there—in a city that, by all standards, could just as well be labelled a west coast backwater fighting off the rivalling shadows of say, L.A. or San Francisco—is an enigma of locale.

The early work of the Vancouver School was focused on the urban fabric and the immense changes underway to the cityscape of Vancouver. From there the artists moved away from the city as subject, but place and landscape remain key concerns in the work of Wallace and Wall in particular. While the work of Wall, Wallace and Lum, for example, cannot be lumped together aesthetically, there are some characteristics which bind these artists together into a "school." These artists rejected an image of an idealized local landscape in favour of an anti-theatrical image of Vancouver as a modern centre of industry from the late 1960s onward. They introduced photography and cinematography into the waning dominance of conceptual art in the late 1970s, and made an argument for photography's capacity to question the postmodern image world. Their works, as previously stated, are characterized by a high degree of intellectualism due in part to the theoretical training of many of them (Wall and Wallace are both trained art historians as well as studio artists).

Ian Wallace graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1968 with an MA in art history and began his teaching career at UBC, soon after moving to the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr University of Art and Design). He was also a practicing photographer and was among the first photographers to use large-format photography in the 1970s, equating photography with the scale of cinema, advertising, and history painting.

In 1973 Wallace produced his first large-scale panoramic photographic work, *La Mélancolie de la rue*. The



triptych comprises three hand-coloured photographic panels with different images placed in stark juxtaposition: the facade of the new Winnipeg Art Gallery, a bulldozed landscape of the new suburbs, and a squatter's shack on the Maplewood Mudflats in North Vancouver. By placing together radically different images and presenting them as one work, Wallace opens space for interpretation between the different images in *La Mélancolie de la rue*, as well as a reflection on the very nature of the medium and the “truth claim” of photography. Coined by cinema studies scholar, Tom Gunning, the term truth claim addresses the belief that traditional photographs index what is seen in a photograph, in other words, that they accurately depict reality. The work of Wallace (and many of his fellow Vancouver School artists) often questions the status of photography, its truthfulness. *La Mélancolie de la rue* is cited by some critics as the origin of Photoconceptualism in Vancouver..



Figure 10.9 Ian Wallace, *Lookout*, installation view at Vancouver Art Gallery, 1979. 12 hand-coloured silver gelatin prints. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

*Lookout* (1979) is a panorama of a rough Canadian West Coast landscape composed of a succession of moments in time and space. The images are hand-tinted black and white photographic enlargements that span a total length of approximately 14.5 metres and are sandwiched between plexiglas and the wall. The use of the panoramic format, a perspective that extends beyond the scope of human vision, references the impact and historical significance of cinema, while the size of the work approximates the grand scale and importance of history painting. Wallace constructed *Lookout* by separately photographing the various individuals in his studio (seen on the contact sheets in the installation itself), pasting these figures onto images of the landscape, then re-photographing and hand-colouring the enlarged images. As none of the individuals in the work were photographed in the actual park, Wallace's composition is fictional. The physical disengagement of the figures emphasizes many peoples' present-day detachment with nature, reinforced by the urban dress and gestures of the models. The process and meaning are important here—and are what make this work a photoconceptual piece.

The 1980s saw Wallace begin to integrate painting and photography at the same time that he began to exhibit his work internationally. Similar to Andy Warhol's diptychs and silkscreens, Wallace explores the theoretical and formal possibilities of painting alongside photography's indexical quality, as we've seen in the Clayoquot works. It was as a student of art history that Wallace came to his visual arts practice, and this



theoretical grounding permeates his sustained meditations on modernist painting, conceptual art, literature, and photography. These concerns are apparent in works like *Support/Surface I & II* (2007), a diptych in which photographs are laminated onto canvas with large white monochromatic bands on either side. The images of a painter's studio show a wooden stretcher leaning against the wall, a large piece of raw canvas strewn about the floor, a large unpainted canvas against the studio wall, a level, a bucket with paintbrush and step stool. The works represent the process of representation itself and ask when a painting is in fact, finished. For Wallace, pairing fundamentally contrasting media—the visual emptiness of the painted monochrome against the visually dense, documentary nature of the photographic image—demonstrates a thorough and sustained reflection on the nature of representation as a method to construct meaning in the world.

Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall both began their careers exploring monochrome abstract painting and minimal sculpture before turning to conceptual photography. Their formative work is indebted to earlier conceptual photographic works like Ed Rusha's *Twentysix Gas Stations* (1963) and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), which are the opposite of creative photography, or Robert Smithson's *The Monuments of Passaic* (1967) in which Smithson photographed various industrial relics he found in Passaic, New Jersey, and re-imagined them as “monuments” from a different time, musing on their artistic significance. Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966-67) is a particularly important reference point for one of Wall's most important works, *Landscape Manual* (1969).

[VIEW JEFF WALL'S \*LANDSCAPE MANUAL\* HERE](#)

*Figure 10.10 Jeff Wall, Landscape Manual, detail (1969) self-published.*

You can view *Landscape Manual* in its entirety here: <https://documents.pub/document/jeff-wall-landscape-manual.html>

Jeff Wall is one of the most influential contemporary artists in the world today and has been credited with an increased attention to and visibility of photography as an important medium in the art world. Wall was a student of Ian Wallace's at UBC before beginning a PhD in 1970 at the Courtauld Institute in London. He never finished that degree, but he read widely in philosophy and studied art history, sculpture, photography, and film; kept up with contemporary art and art criticism; and delved into the increasingly influential field of critical theory, including film theory. In 1987 he began teaching at UBC, where he still lives and works today. In the early 1970s, after an interruption of seven years, Wall returned to art making and began handling photography in a new way. Set in advertising lightboxes, his large-scale back-lit cibachrome transparencies cast a fresh eye at modern life. All his subsequent works, mostly showing assembled figures or portraits, sometimes partly manipulated, include references to classic painting, cinema, or theatre. Though his works often look documentary, his photographs are subtly out of kilter with the reality they depict.

Jeff Wall's major work from his early period is his 1969 *Landscape Manual*, a cheaply printed booklet with typewritten texts and half-tone reproductions of city views of indifferent quality taken from a car window. The annotated text includes a commentary on the making of the landscape photographs. The images illustrating the manual show subjects such as a suburban road with vacant lots, cars, and houses. By using the approach of an instructional book, Wall provides a critical narrative on the generic, de-featured, suburban landscape all the while parodying the “objective” gaze of documentary photography. *Landscape Manual* is deeply conceptual. Its anti-aesthetic strategy is reinforced by the printed “25¢” price on the cover. This low-tech manual, 40 pages in length and published in an edition of 400, parodies a scientific manual, and as with other early photoconceptualist works by Wallace, Wall's manual has something of the character of collage or montage and *dérivé* of the Situationists. The work is also a visual examination of the mechanisms of photography; in *Landscape Manual*, Wall challenges the photographic image as “fact” by illustrating its constructed and

contrived making. Photography was historically believed to capture truth, but with this work Wall demonstrates that this is most certainly not the case. The photographs in the manual turn away from literal readings of “Vancouver as it used to be,” to an understanding that “Vancouver never looked like that.”

VIEW JEFF WALL'S MIMIC HERE

*Figure 10.11 Jeff Wall, Mimic, 1982, copyright Jeff Wall*

*Mimic* (1982) can be seen as a turning point in Wall's career, an evolution of his practice. The starting point for *Mimic* was not another work of art but a racist incident that Wall himself had observed on the street: a working-class white man with his girlfriend in tow had raised his finger to the corner of his eye in a gesture intended to mock the facial features of an Asian man walking nearby. Recreating the incident meant hiring appropriate people to play the three roles, rehearsing the action, and finally staging and restaging the scene until the photographer was satisfied. In other words, the activity was like making a shot for a film, with Wall in the combined position of director and cinematographer. Many critics have referred to Gustave Caillbeotte's *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (1877) as a possible source for *Mimic*, but there is a shift here in that Wall's photograph does not refer to or depend upon any single painting from the past for its existence.

Writer and art historian Sharla Sava writes:

*Pictures such as Jeff Wall's Mimic (1982), Milk (1984), and Diatribe (1985), or, more recently, A View from an Apartment (2004-05) are compositions intended to convey typical figures whose interpretation relies on the dramatic structure of social meaning. As viewers, we search for the motives which, stemming from the interior world of the subject, have become embodied as recognizable physical gestures. As well, we look to the exterior world portrayed in the picture to see what role these gestures will play in the constitutions of the public world. In each case, the picture, composed of actors posing on location, is an artificial construction of fragments which appears as a dramatic, novelistic unity while the camera, with its indexical relationship to the real, inevitably confirms an element of objective reality...Because the social subjects portrayed in the work are staged and directed, we can see that the use of typology approximates a theatrical, cinematic mode. But they are actors deprived of the ability to speak, frozen in arrested motion. (2007, 56)*

What Sava is getting at in her assessment of Wall's photographs is the artist's exploration of our faith in images, our belief in representation. Many of Wall's photographs both reveal the photographic mechanisms involved in producing the final image while simultaneously carefully contriving and orchestrating scenes.

Wall is also well-known for quoting from art history in his large-scale photographs. Watch this TVO video which takes a close look at his painting *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993):



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-5>

## LEARNING JOURNAL 10.6

Consider *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* and answer the following questions in two or three

paragraphs: How does Jeff Wall uphold or push against the idea of instantaneity, in this artwork and in his process? How does the idea of “instantaneity” connect with current culture and cultural products? How do traditional cinematic techniques support Jeff Wall in communicating his concept? Look closely at the characters in the work who don’t all appear to connect. Describe what you think their relationships are; what are they all doing here together?

If what became known as Vancouver photoconceptualism began in part as a reaction to the quickly gentrifying and growing economic climate of Vancouver, it was quickly absorbed by it and participated in it. The artwork of the Vancouver School photographers was quickly commodified into a burgeoning—and most importantly international—art market. Melanie O’Brian charts the shift in Vancouver’s relationship to the art market:

*Ostensibly existing outside the effects of an international art scene or the art market, Vancouver has been perceived as a peripheral city that manages to produce remarkable artists without the powerful promotional systems evident in cities like New York or London. It might be argued that Vancouver has now shed its previous status as marginal and arrived on the international art map, commercial endeavors playing an increasingly significant role in its growth and maturation. The tactic toward internationalism is another sign of Vancouver’s changing art economy, and reflects a larger move within the city and province to recognize the benefits of culture to the general economy. Given the effects of globalization on Vancouver, the art world mirrors a shifting aspiration toward the international that can be attributed to at least two significant factors. First, that the visual arts, as part of the cultural sector, have been identified as contributing to the gross domestic product, and second, that the international success of a handful of Vancouver artists has set a benchmark for interested outsiders as well as for subsequent generations of Vancouver artists.*

[...]

*Within this period of growing international reputation, art and artists in Vancouver were branded, concurrent with the rise of a culture of designer labels and market research. Since the mid-1980s, Rodney Graham, Ken Lum, Jeff Wall, and Ian Wallace (and sometimes Roy Arden and Stan Douglas) have been entangled and exported under the Vancouver School label. French art historian Jean-Francois Chevrier is cited as being responsible for the designation, which is at once useful and erroneous, a term that could only be achieved from a distanced, outside perspective and in conjunction with other such “schools” of practice or thought. It has been argued that this label arose at a moment when consumer labeling—not only for products but for cities and lifestyles—became ever more important to marketers. The assignation functioned to represent Vancouver to an international art world, establishing a benchmark for the manner in which Vancouver art is to be understood. The vehicles for the presentation of Vancouver art include important international museum exhibitions, biennials, and art fairs, pointing to an ideological construct that follows a world’s fair or Expo model to promote identities that serve a dominant paradigm. The artists held under the Vancouver School umbrella do not often exhibit their work in Vancouver and are represented by galleries in New York, London, and Frankfurt rather than in Vancouver (or Canada, for that matter). Thus, the market economy for their work exists internationally, while their intellectual economy is constructed between home and away. (O’Brian 2007, 13-23)*

The intellectualism and the criticality of the photoconceptualists in Vancouver came to be at odds with the way their work was co-opted and absorbed into the global international art market, a process which has in many cases stripped the work of its political implications. As Sava writes, “Photoconceptualism has become

popular as a term used to address this period of art production in Vancouver. Yet it has been terms such as photoconceptualism which have obscured the political and aesthetic implications of this historical transition” (2007, 50). The 2017 exhibition *Pictures from Here* at the Vancouver Art Gallery attempted to redress the perception that photoconceptualism is simply apolitical spectacle and the only dominating force in the Vancouver art scene. You can read more about the exhibition [here](#).

## Winnipeg Gothic

As in Vancouver, contemporary art in Winnipeg is a product of a unique set of local conditions. In Vancouver, it was the city’s rapid rise to economic prominence that catalyzed its art scene; in Winnipeg, it was the city’s long and storied past. Historically known as the “Gateway to the West,” Winnipeg, Manitoba sits on the eastern edge of the Canadian Prairies. Also commonly referred to as the Forks, for the area’s confluence of two major rivers, it was a crossroads of canoe routes travelled by Indigenous peoples long before European settlement. Under French colonial settlement it became known as Fort Rouge, and it was subsequently named Fort Garry when the British Hudson’s Bay Company established an outpost there. Manitoba joined Confederation in 1870 and developed rapidly after the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881. By 1911, Winnipeg was Canada’s third-largest city.

But the area that Winnipeg currently occupies is layered with a deeply rooted traumatic social history. In 1869–70 it was the site of the Red River Resistance, led by Louis Riel, in which a colony of farmers and hunters, many of them Métis, fought for their culture and land rights under Canadian control. There was the massive failure of the New republic at Gimli in which the Canadian government granted a large group of Icelanders the 60 square kilometers on Lake Manitoba named Gimli, and termed it the Icelandic Reserve. Unfortunately, a terrible winter set in on the Manitoba Icelandic settlers. While the Icelanders were used to snow and brutal cold, they were nonetheless not prepared for the weather that year. Many died, and by 1880, the area had been reabsorbed by the Canadian government and the experiment of New Iceland came to a close. By 1914, Winnipeg as an economic center declined further when the Panama Canal opened, reducing international trade’s reliance on Canada’s rail system. In this era there was massive unemployment and inflation. The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, one of the most famous and influential strikes in Canadian history, resulted in Bloody Sunday: troubled by the growing number of protestors and fearing violence, Mayor Gray called in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, who rode in on horseback charging into the crowd of strikers, beating them with clubs and firing weapons. Other layers of historical traumas have marked Winnipeg: Russian Mennonites fleeing persecution, and Jewish holocaust survivors, both arrived in search of a safe haven at different moments in history.

The idea that Winnipeg is haunted by the ghosts of its past has had a profound impact on its artists. Contemporary art offers us a unique and potent means to process collective, historic trauma. Its philosophy informs the work of a number of contemporary artists from the Canadian prairies. Most of these artists don’t set out to recreate Winnipeg’s past; rather, they have a heightened sensitivity to the traumas of history.

The contemporary gothic genre in Winnipeg was found first in the work of the Winnipeg Royal Art Lodge in the 1990s. Gothic was originally a form of 12-13th century architecture, but has come to mean anything dark, broody, and scary, thanks to the 19th-century Victorians. Based in Winnipeg and founded in 1996, the Winnipeg Royal Art Lodge was the collective of Michael Dumontier, Marcel Dzama, Neil Farber, Drue Langlois, Jon Pylypchuk, and Adrian Williams. The majority of the works produced were small-scale drawings and paintings which often incorporated text and a twisted combination of fairy-tale innocence and sinister innuendo. Surrealist influence is evident in some of the Lodge’s drastic dark humour; for example, at their drawing sessions a work would be passed from one to the other, much like the Surrealist exquisite corpse game in which each participant takes turns writing or drawing on a sheet of paper, folding it to conceal his or her contribution, and then passing it to the next player for a further contribution. For members of the Lodge, anything was a suitable

surface for their collaborative artworks: matchbook covers, old envelopes, cereal box flaps, loose-leaf paper, hotel stationary. The artists would meet every Wednesday night for years to make art. As time wore on, their ideas and ambitions drifted apart, and they disbanded officially in 2008. Many of the members went on to great things. Marcel Dzama became a bona fide art star.

[VIEW MARCEL DZAMA'S UNTITLED HERE](#)

*Figure 10.12 Marcel Dzama, Untitled (2002)*

Dzama rose to international acclaim for his drawings of unusual humanoid figures, fantastical animals, and imaginary hybrids. In a review of Dzama's work in the New York Times, Deborah Solomon writes:

*When you first see the art of Marcel Dzama, you may feel you are looking at illustrations from some quaintly antique children's book. He specializes in pen-and-ink drawings in which pale, slender women routinely meet up with rabbits and talking trees. Yet Dzama isn't making art for children.*

*He uses his innocent-looking style to capture a savage contemporary universe, a place that is grimmer than any Grimm's tale. It's as if you have wandered off the proverbial path to grandmother's house and stumbled upon some secret internment camp where bossy personality types (men with rifles, flying bats) oversee the wounded and the weak.*

*[...]*

*Born in 1974 in the isolated Canadian wilds of Winnipeg, Dzama grew up in a working-class family, the oldest of three children. His father, a baker, worked behind the cake counter at a Safeway supermarket. ("I made friends with the cake decorator, and she would give me gingerbread all the time," the artist said.) He recalled himself as a tense, dyslexic youth who had trouble decoding basic sentences and dreaded the pressure of having to stand up in front of his classmates to read a passage from Shakespeare aloud. Early on, he took refuge in drawing; he started a comic strip about his teddy bear, "whose name happened to be Ted," he said.*

*He earned his first fame in 1996 as a senior at the University of Manitoba. There he founded the Royal Art Lodge, an ironically named collective that can put you in mind of hunters and wild boar. But this lodge's members wielded colored pencils, and they sat around late into the night, often working on one another's compositions; in coming years, they would exhibit together as well, locally at first and then at galleries in Los Angeles, New York and London.*

*[...]*

*Dzama spoke of the piece [Snowman Canisters] as a personal farewell to chilly Winnipeg and his entire Canadian past. Yet even the past is never really past, as that other Marcel, the author of "Remembrance of Things Past," was always reminding us.*

Dzama's work is deeply resonant with the place in which the artist grew up and established his career. His recent shift to creating large-scale tableaux and animated videos, where he uses many characters from his earlier drawings, have propelled him to international success. His work has also been used for the cover of music albums, notably *The Else* by They Might Be Giants, *Guero* by Beck, and *Reconstruction Site* by The Weakerthans. Dzama has produced numerous collaborations with artists and collectives, including the New York City Ballet.

WATCH this 6 minute video on Marcel Dzama's collaboration with the New York City Ballet in 2016.

Diana Thorneycroft is another example of a Winnipeg-based artist whose work, similarly to Dzama's, considers the darker side of supposedly innocent or benign objects like dolls, toys and cartoon characters. In her series *A People's History* she uses dolls and toys to craft scenes of events in Manitoban and Canadian history that are often left out or minimized (much like the art of "peripheries" that we've examined in this module). Her use of toys in didactic scenes are unsettling. Art historian David Garneau writes about the series as it was displayed in 2011 at the Art Gallery of Regina that:

*Diana Thorneycroft's photographs are excoriating. They are beautiful instruments designed to cause pain. Her child-like play is tainted by a sinister adult knowingness. Her seductive, richly coloured scenes meticulously contrived with dolls, toys, miniatures and backdrops from "Group of Seven" paintings are reminiscent of photo-illustrated storybooks. But the stories they tell are horrific events from Canadian history. These are not tales of the 'Mad-Trapper,' train robbers, rumrunners or other rogues whose crimes time renders into colourful legend. These are our national shames that many would rather bury and forget. [...] Thorneycroft has a history of working with dolls. Much of her work concerns the sexualizing and abuse of children. Her pictorial revelations are not designed to titillate but to warn, to break the silence. Secrets shield predators. Perhaps if children were not as protected from adult designs they might be better able to recognize, avoid or call out abusers. I think that Thorneycroft makes these images in a storybook style not to trivialize these events but as a literal model for future story and history books. These are reasonably palatable portals to indigestible realities that children need to know something about in order to protect themselves. Canadians also need to know the fullness of their country's stories if history is not to repeat itself. (Garneau 2011)*

Watch Thorneycroft's PechaKucha talk delivered in Winnipeg in 2020 on this series.

Choose one work that she shares and investigate the historical scene using one or two online sources such as The Canadian Encyclopedia. How does Thorneycroft's work interpret the event itself? How does it situate the location where the event occurs and its relevance to Canadian history? How does it unsettle the viewer through her visual style?

## Qaumajuq in Winnipeg

Winnipeg has recently made headline news with the opening in 2021 of Qaumajuq, the first Inuit Art Centre, a 40,000 square foot addition to the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG). Why was Winnipeg chosen as the location for this important addition to Indigenous visual art in Canada? The WAG has one of the world's biggest and most extraordinary collections of Inuit art; it has exhibited and published on Inuit art more than any other museum in the world. Qaumajuq (which means "it is bright, it is lit" in Inuktitut) showcases more than 10,000 Inuit works from the WAG's collection, many of which had previously been relegated to storage. In addition to exhibitions, Qaumajuq will also offer a space for research and education, bridging Canada's north and south and raising the profile of Inuit art.

Qaumajuq responds to the legacies of colonialism at the WAG. Gabriella Angeleti writes an overview of the inaugural exhibition at Qaumajuq in *The Art Newspaper*:

*A recent online preview event for Qaumajuq began with a land acknowledgement, or formal statement intended to recognise Indigenous communities as the original stewards of the region. The WAG was*

*built on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Ininiwak, Anishiniwak, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.*

*The centre's inaugural exhibition, Inua (27 March-19 December [2021]), meaning “Inuit move forward together” and organised by a team of Inuit curators, presents the work of more than 90 contemporary Inuit artists, including several new commissions. It will be accompanied by a series of virtual programmes that seek to advance the understanding of historical and contemporary Inuit art.*

*Founded in 1912, the WAG holds the largest public collection of Inuit art in the world, comprising around 14,000 pieces by more than 2,000 artists that date back as far as the 1880s. In 1964, it became the first museum to organise a major exhibition dedicated to Inuit carvings, and it was the first to appoint a full-time curator of Inuit art in 1972. Despite those milestones, its collecting history—as with most institutions that own Indigenous works of art—is fraught.*

*The Vienna-born curator Ferdinand Eckhardt became the director of the WAG in 1953 and acquired Inuit soapstone carvings for the museum from the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in Winnipeg, a historic fur trading post that had a pivotal role in the development of Canada and the displacement of Inuit communities. He was later criticised for framing Inuit works as an advanced form of folk art and failing to give the artists the same due as their European counterparts.*

*Other colonial undertones, like the problematic history of the HBC, its entanglement in colonialism and its role in commercialising and exploiting Inuit artists, were also largely ignored in subsequent shows, some critics argued. Most of what eventually arrived in the WAG’s Inuit collection was donated by Winnipeg-based collectors with ties to the HBC, which now operates as a chain of department stores.*

*The lead curator of Inua, Inuk art historian Heather Igloliorte, and the WAG’s head of Indigenous initiatives, Julia Lafreniere, who is Métis, say the curatorial framework and programming of the museum will act as a rebuttal to the WAG’s past and challenge the anthropological presentation of Indigenous histories in museums. Organisers will continue to collaborate with a panel of Nunavut advisors to ensure that Indigenous voices are at the forefront from now on (2021).*

Watch lead curator and art historian Heather Igloliorte take you through Inua in this virtual tour:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=599#oembed-6>

Take some time and look through the website for Qaumajuq here.

## Race, space, and place

Location and place have been important subjects for artists whose work asks viewers to consider how location, identity, migration, and belonging are all intimately connected. What makes a place meaningful to people in personal, political, cultural, and social terms? Can an artist’s image of a place communicate a sense of that meaning? How are ideas of home connected to neighbourhoods, the city, and space? And, in turn, how do these particular places inform feelings of identity and a sense of home?



## VIEW ZINNIA NAQVI'S *THE WANDERERS* HERE

Figure 10.13 Zinnia Naqvi, *The Wanderers – Niagara's Falls, 1988* from the *Yours to Discover* series

*The Wanderers – Niagara's Falls, 1988* by Zinnia Naqvi is part of a series entitled *Yours to Discover* (2019), which takes its name from the province of Ontario's former tourism slogan. The images are contemporary still-lives that combine found family snapshots with board games, VHS tapes, books, and other objects reminiscent of the 1980s aura of the photographs. The family photographs in each image are from trips taken by her parents from Karachi, Pakistan as they considered the prospect of immigrating to Canada. In this photograph, the family is imaged at one of Canada's best-known tourist sites, Niagara Falls, Ontario. During her family's reconnaissance missions, they visited other well-known tourist destinations like the CN Tower, Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village.

Zinnia Naqvi is an interdisciplinary artist based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal and Tkaronto/Toronto. Her work addresses colonialism, cultural translation, language, and gender through the use of photography, video, the written word, and archival material. Through Naqvi's family tourist visits to places like Niagara Falls, the family were sold on the utopic possibility and seemingly pristine landscapes they encountered. Shortly after immigrating, Naqvi was born in the suburbs of Pickering, Ontario, where she grew up.

Naqvi's series *Yours to Discover* was installed outside in Vancouver during the Capture Photography Festival in 2021. Watch a guide to the installation here (note that the video tour is in Korean but with English subtitles):



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=599#oembed-7>

The incorporation of popular board games and toys gives the images a playful, dynamic appearance; only at a closer reading of the work do its more critical and political aspects become evident. "Resembling still lifes...[s]ome of the objects surrounding the images speak to stereotypical depictions of other cultures—such as Disney's *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*. Books pertaining to the immigrant experience are also subtly integrated into the compositions, with titles such as *The New Pakistani Middle Class* and *Touring Home From Away* visible upon closer inspection" (Martens 2019).

The photographs are carefully constructed still-lives shot in the artist's studio. Curator Darrin Martens writes,

*Naqvi's images reflect a shared reality for many people living in Brampton, where more than half of its residents are new immigrants, and visible minorities account for the majority of its population, particularly those of South Asian descent. Traditionally, the tableau vivant incorporated costumed actors strategically placed within a carefully lit, prop-filled scene, which was then painted or photographed to narrate a specific event, action, or idea. In this series Naqvi takes the concept of living pictures to another level of discourse and critical engagement. The Naqvi family's photographs insert the Pakistani body within these tourist environments, creating a backdrop that challenges traditional pictorial representation. Issues related to consumerism, development, personal agency, and colonial cultural stereotypes are each subtly, yet tactically, embedded into Naqvi's images (2019).*

## VIEW SHELLIE ZHANG'S *A PLACE FOR WHOLESOME AMUSEMENT* HERE

Figure 10.14 Shellie Zhang, *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*, 2018

Shellie Zhang is a Beijing-born artist who lives and works in Tkaronto/Toronto. Themes of tradition, gender, the diaspora and popular culture permeate her works. In her 2018 neon installation work, *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*, Zhang reimagined the marquee signage of an old theatre that has left important legacies to Chinese and Jewish immigrants in Toronto. The artist was invited to research the holdings of the Ontario Jewish

Archives (OJA) for overlaps between Jewish and Chinese histories in the city. Her research at OJA unearthed the history of a building on the north-east corner of Dundas and Spadina at 285 Spadina Avenue that is today a Rexall pharmacy. The building was first known as the Standard Theatre, which opened as a Yiddish theatre in 1922 and five decades later hosted Chinese cinema as the Golden Harvest Theatre (Zhang n.d.). This particular location is adjacent to the historical immigrant ghetto of St. John's Ward in Toronto, an area that was home to Irish, Italian, Black, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants, among others. It was a lively cosmopolitan area where many immigrants, as Annie Wong notes,

*were subject to discriminatory policies and normalized racism. By the 1960s, the neighbourhood was largely demolished for the construction of the new City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square. The displaced Chinese relocated just a few blocks west to become neighbours, once again, with the Jewish community that had established the Standard Theatre in 1921. Over the course of its history, the Standard Theatre underwent various name changes and transformations from its “wholesome” beginnings as Toronto’s first Yiddish playhouse in the 1920s: into a movie theatre, place of burlesque, and then a venue for punk bands and community dance recitals. In 1975, the Hong Kong-based motion picture studio Golden Harvest acquired the building and began screening legendary Kung Fu films starring the likes of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, targeted to the growing Chinese audience in Canada (2018).*

Watch this video which introduces *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=599#oembed-8>

In *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*, the marquee designs from the Standard Theatre are reimagined as simplified neon sculptures and based on an historical drawing from the archive, while the design used to represent the Golden Harvest signage is entirely imaginary. Wong analyzes the installation, writing:

*By way of this speculation, Zhang also invites us to imagine what social dynamic may have existed within the spatial overlapping of cultures. What can be suggested in the social spaces where Chinese family clan associations formed nearby to where Jewish labour unions were established? Zhang’s playful invention of the Golden Harvest Theatre’s marquee gestures towards what she describes as “a new hope” for future practices of remembering and rethinking “the silos” of the past, the ways in which institutional archives can sometimes produce cultural histories isolated from one another. In this space beyond the residual is a form of collaborative remembering, a narratology shaped by the resilience of past cultural texts and the desire for future pluralistic frameworks. Side by side, the two marquees, in their proximity, propose a kind of kinship, a way to engage in a cross-cultural collective memory (2018).*

The neon installation addresses how one site can comprise multiple cultural histories, and how this site served as a “hub for cultural expression and cohesion for two different communities” in Toronto (Zhang n.d.). When the neon sculptures were exhibited at the artist-run centre FENTSTER in 2018, they were accompanied by historic information detailing more than 75 years of the building’s continuous operation, along with reproductions of archival materials. The immigrant stories and histories embedded in places and architecture are made tangible in Zhang’s installation.

Take a minute to answer the following questions: where were you born, what is your ancestry, and where do you feel a sense of home? What place, what city or location makes you feel at home and like you belong? As “A Place to Belong,” a podcast about the history of multiculturalism in Canada, states:

*For many Canadians, the answers to the first two questions probably involve a country outside of what is now Canada. The country we know today has been shaped by policies that encourage immigration and welcome a wide array of people from all corners of the globe. In fact, almost a quarter of Canada’s current population is foreign born. But the journey to a multicultural Canada hasn’t been a straight path. As you’ll learn over the course of this five-part series, government policies in the 19th and 20th centuries restricted or banned mainly non-European communities from entering the country. Even if they were able to settle here, many faced [and face] hardships in a society that historically viewed many immigrants, particularly non-white people, as quote unquote ‘undesirable’ (“A Place to Belong,” 2022).*

Thinking about Zinnia Naqvi’s *The Wanderers – Niagara’s Falls, 1988*, or Shellie Zhang’s *A Place for Wholesome Amusement*, choose one of these artworks and, in one or two paragraphs, discuss how the artwork you selected engages with themes of migration, belonging, identity, multiculturalism, location, and urban development. Be sure to address visual details in the artworks and consider your own emotional reactions to the work.

#### OBJECT STORIES

- Hilary Doda on a Nova Scotia wool mural (1953)
- Jessica Mace on “A Cheap Farm House” (c. 1864—)
- Gabrielle Moser on Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001)

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# ACTIVISM

Figure 11.1 Life of a Craphead, *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River*, 2017.

In fall 2017, Life of a Craphead (the art, film, and curatorial duo of Amy Lam and Jon McCurley), produced a series of performances in which they floated a life-size replica statue of King Edward VII—who ruled the British Empire in the first decade of the twentieth century, down the Lower Don River in Toronto, Ontario. The sculpture imitates the 15-foot bronze statue that sits in Queen’s Park adjacent to the Ontario Legislative Building in Toronto. This playful intervention is a work of activism that critiques “the persistence of power as it manifests in public art and public monuments—symbols that are often preserved in perpetuity, even when the stories we want to celebrate change” (Don River Valley Park). In this module, we will examine art that seeks to intervene in social, political, economic and environmental issues, going beyond an aesthetic statement to enact meaningful change.

Watch this short documentary about Life of a Craphead’s King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River (2017 ~4 min).

## LEARNING JOURNAL 11.1

Read the following three op-eds (opinions and editorials pages, which are typically published in newspapers and not necessarily written by journalists). What perspective does each writer take on this artwork? Do the writers support the premises in the work? Why or why not? What words do they use to characterize and describe the work (e.g., unpatriotic, rebellious, timely, activist, good, bad)?

Toronto Star, “King Edward, Down the Don River without a Paddle” by Murray Whyte

Vulture, “Forget Art Basel Miami Beach — Put on Your Puffer Coat and Head North to Toronto” by Yaniya Lee

CBC News, “Dumping Statue in the Don River a Statement about Colonialism, Performance Artists Say” by Makda Ghebreslassie

## Toppling monuments

While Life of a Craphead’s work takes part in the debate that raged across Canada, the US, and Europe (among other places) in recent other controversial monuments have been toppled in the recent years. Christiana Abrahms, curator of an exhibition titled “Protests and Pedagogy: Representations, Memories, and Meanings,” provides this concise overview of the recent backlash against public monuments spurred by protests around racial injustice:

*The police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African-American man in Minneapolis, United States, in early 2020 unleashed a wave of angry street protests led by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Huge anti-racism protests featuring tens of thousands of persons of diverse races and ages, that began largely in the United States, have brought attention to the proliferation of police brutality, systemic racism, and racial in/justice (Cheung 2020; Altman 2020).*

*The replay in the media of video that captured the arrest and slow, public killing of Floyd sent ripples across the world in the weeks and months that followed, spurring protests in Canada, Europe, and further afield (Bennett et al. 2020; Aljazeera 2020). As part of these manifestations, protestors have taken to demonstrating against statues and public monuments (MacDonald 2020; Selvin and Solomon 2020). These targeted monuments are viewed as heroizing persons associated with colonialism, slavery, and imperialism. Hence, protestors demand the removal of these symbols of slavery or colonial power. Monuments that have received the most vehement protestations are those representing historical figures, recognized slave traders or owners, or those viewed as having supported outright racist policies against Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people. In these protests, prominent public monuments have been pulled down, defaced, painted over, toppled, graffitied, reconfigured, restaged, and reimagined in myriad ways (Draper 2020; Togoh 2020).*

*Colonial figures, confederate generals, and slave traders across the United States, Great Britain, and Europe have received the brunt of protestations...*

*In Canada, various statues of the first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, were selected. A group protesting against police violence in Montreal, pulled a statue of Macdonald off its plinth such that it was decapitated as it crashed to the ground (CBC 2020).*

*Activists, demanding that these statues be brought down, say their aim is to change historical narratives and to remind people of the full and complex biographies of these heroized figures who actively participated in the often- genocidal marginalization of Black and Indigenous people and other people of colour. As David MacDonald writes, “These protests highlight the racism of these infamous figures, the racist societies that produced these representations and the ways these representations and these statues continue to both normalize and obscure settler violence and systemic racism” (MacDonald, 2020).*

For more on “Race, Gender, and Decolonization in the Public Space,” read Abraham’s interview with art historian Charmaine A. Nelson [here](#) (click on the PDF to access).

## LEARNING JOURNAL 11.2

Research the removal of a particular monument. Why was it removed? What do you think of the removal of controversial monuments from public spaces? For more you may want to consider points raised in this article by Gary Younge on “Why every single statue should come down”.

While artists haven’t necessarily removed statues, they have staged activist interventions to address controversial monuments in public spaces. For instance, in 2017 David Garneau, a Métis artist, engaged with a statue of the former Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald in the performance work *Dear John, Louis David*



*Riel*. In this work Garneau comments on MacDonald's role as architect of the residential school system in Canada and in the arrest and subsequent hanging of Riel for treason. In *Dear John*, Garneau takes on the persona of 19th-century Métis leader Louis Riel to create what he calls a "monologue" and a "dialogue" with the statue, which includes "a rant taken from his trial transcripts; there's a pleading, moving through all these stages, these types of grief" (Source: <https://canadianart.ca/interviews/david-garneau/>).

Anishnaabe artist, Rebecca Belmore's *Quote, Misquote, Fact* (2003) also responds to a statue of MacDonald. To create this three-part graphite on vellum work, Belmore made a series of rubbings from an inscription at the base of a monument to Macdonald in City Park in Kingston, Ontario—the city of MacDonald's birth and where he is buried. By selectively removing words from various sections of the inscription, Belmore's rubbings drastically change the meaning of the text. For Belmore, the statues offer a means to engage with current representations of history. Explaining the work, she states: "As someone who grew up with very little access to our history through the education system—I feel compelled to witness and articulate and in some way visually mark current history." (Source: <https://agnes.queensu.ca/explore/collections/object/quote-misquote-fact/>)

In her interview with curator and communication scholar Christiana Abraham, art historian Charmaine Nelson speaks to the importance of public decolonial activism in Canada. She notes:

*In general, most Canadians have no idea about the nation's colonial history. They don't understand how Canada became Canada; they don't understand about Indigenous dispossession. They certainly don't understand that we had at least two hundred years of transatlantic slavery where both Black and Indigenous people were enslaved in a province like Quebec, and Black people were enslaved from Ontario all the way to Newfoundland.*

*Therefore, our conversations about monuments as colonial are not based upon a full understanding of these contexts because we don't know how to grapple with the complexity of colonial history. Some people can't hold these two thoughts in their minds at the same time—Sir John Macdonald central in founding the nation of Canada and Sir John Macdonald central in the architecture of the residential school system and the death and harm of many Chinese male immigrants. They can't hold these two thoughts at the same time. (Abraham 2021, 10)*

Given the lack of acknowledgement and understanding of colonialism in Canada, art offers one way forward—a means to engage with public historical record. The above examples of how artists have engaged with monuments speak to a few of the ways we can understand art as activism. This module examines a wide range of practices in this vein, showcasing different modes of engagement and ways that activism can and has functioned as a means of resistance and driver of social change. As such, the module makes the case for art as activism in a manner explained by artist Marcus Ellsworth, who describes art as: "a bringer of change . . . a way to connect people, to engage people, to motivate and move people to action." (Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLg8LMK\\_Ct4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLg8LMK_Ct4))

### LEARNING JOURNAL 11.3

Do you think art can or should enact change? Why or why not?

## By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- explain how art can function as a form of activism
- describe how artists have used monuments to speak to contentious histories in North America

- analyse how artists have employed art as a means to address hegemonic understandings of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (amongst other topics)
- discuss how artists have engaged with non-traditional materials as an effective medium for relaying activist ideas, including articulating anti-war sentiments and critique militaristic policies.

## This module will take you:

**Life of A Craphead**

**Toppling monuments**

**Outcomes and content**

**Privilege: Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge**

**General Idea & AIDS activism**

**Violence meets vulnerability – Barbara Todd & Barb Hunt**

**Where Hope Meets Action: Black Lives Matter**

## Key works:

- Life of a Craphead, *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017)
- David Garneau, *Dear John, Louis David Riel* (2017)
- Rebecca Belmore, *Quote, Misquote, Fact* (2003)
- Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, *It's Still Privileged Art* (1975)
- Barbara Todd, *Security Blanket* (1989)
- Barb Hunt, *Antipersonnel* (1998-2010)
- Natalie Wood, *I Can't breathe* (2019)
- Canadian \$10 Bill (2018)
- Letitia Fraser, *Virtuous Woman* (2019)
- David Woods (design) and Laurel Francis (quilting) *Preston* (2007)
- Sade Alexis, *Rosemary* (2021)

## Introduction to activism and art

The activist potential of art has long been debated in art history. A dominant trend within discussions of activist art, exemplified by publications such as *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art and Activism* (1995), is to focus on activist art in relation to the emergence of conceptual art and political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the civil rights and feminist movements. However, recent publications such as *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* (2007) have sought to recognize the longer historical relationship between art and activism at heightened moments of social and political transformation, tracing this connection during periods such as the Paris Commune in 1871. More recent discussions in the field of activist art focus on collaboration as a key element of socially engaged practice, including the analysis of relational practices in *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) by Nicolas Bourriaud and the examination of diverse artistic partnerships in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004) by Grant Kester. Collaborative methods of practice are increasingly the norm in contemporary art. Such works prioritise process over object production and technical proficiency, as well as social engagement and community over artistic autonomy. At the same time, the spheres of contemporary art and activism are increasingly intertwined.

## Privilege: Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=142#oembed-1>

Against the backdrop of ongoing debates over labour (including “women’s work” and developments in the labour movement), Toronto-based contemporary artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge have engaged with trade unions in their art practice. Collaborating for more than thirty-years, they have sought to bridge working communities and the art world through their projects. They have been recognized for their unique collaborative practice and their extensive collaborations with trade unions since the 1980s, resulting in the production of vibrant photographic compositions that critically reflect on workers’ conditions and histories of labour in Canada.

Influenced by their relationship with the New York art scene (including the Art & Language group), in 1975 Condé and Beveridge decided to embark upon their first collaboration, producing new work reflecting their recent experiences. These works comprised the exhibition *It’s Still Privileged Art*, which was shown in 1976 at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, and subsequently exhibited at Canada House Gallery in London, in the United Kingdom. The show was charged by revolutionary iconography. It contained several silkscreen and photographic works based on the artists’ political involvement.

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, *It’s Still Privileged Art*, 1975 <https://condebeveridge.ca/project/its-still-privileged-art-1975-edited-version/>

A key work in the exhibition, from which the show drew its name, *It’s Still Privileged Art* took shape as a series of twenty-one illustrations in a stark representational style, in black and white, with bright accents of red. These drawings were exhibited and also formed a bookwork that took the place of the traditional exhibition catalogue. This work is based on a series of conversations between the artists in 1975 that reflected critically on the nature of the art world and their place within it. These conversations address both the personal and professional roles of the artists and are in parts playful, confessional, critical, and self-critical. Formally, the artists are quoting Soviet revolutionary iconography and Chinese comics of the period. Each scene is punctuated by a text caption explaining the narrative. One, for example, features Beveridge creating a minimalist work in the studio. The caption reads: “Karl sets up a new variation within a series of work that has preoccupied him for the past year. The work focuses on possible shifts of perception brought about by exclusively logical means.” Other scenes delve into the dynamics of a meeting with a curator, their interactions with a collector, and with their larger artistic community. Power relationships are foregrounded, example in the depictions of the curator’s visit and the artists’ interactions with a collector, the latter depicting the successful sale of a drawing. Pivotal issues such as gender relations, the art market and artistic labour are all addressed in *It’s Still Privileged Art*.

These key themes are in evidence in subsequent work by Condé and Beveridge, and continue to drive their practice today. *It’s Still Privileged Art* also marks issues of interest that the artists subsequently pursue in concrete ways through different labour organisations in Canada—including their work to develop banners for various unions and groups.

## General Idea – Art addressing queer identity and the AIDS crisis

Another art group that coalesced in Toronto in the period was General Idea, initially an anonymous group that crystallized into an intentional three-part group comprised of Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, and AA Bronson. The

group is well known for their work addressing the discourse on AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. Sarah E.K. Smith explains:

*In the late 1980s AIDS was a taboo topic and a climate of fear surrounded the disease due to widespread and extreme homophobia. This was because initially the disease was thought to exclusively affect gay men. For instance, in 1981 the first article in the New York Times to address AIDS identified it as a cancer that only affected homosexuals. This was not helped by the fact that inaccurate and inflammatory information about the disease circulated widely in the media. Many aspects of the AIDS pandemic, including its scope and severity, were not at first understood. Tremendous prejudice—including within the medical community—was widespread given the initial impact of AIDS in the gay community and its sexual transmission. As such, there was a moral dimension to the AIDS pandemic that activists, as well as artists, sought to address. (Smith, ACI, 2016) <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/general-idea/biography/>)*

Within this context, General Idea took a brazen approach to addressing the crisis, beginning with the 1987 painting AIDS produced for a fundraiser to benefit the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR). This painting subsequently sparked the group to more broadly address the discourse on HIV/AIDS in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Robert Indiana, LOVE, 1966, oil on canvas, 182.6 x 182.6 x 6.4 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art.

In AIDS, 1987, the artists appropriated American artist Robert Indiana's (b. 1928) painting LOVE, 1966, replacing the word "LOVE" with the name of the new disease. The ironic appropriation of Indiana's work was, AA Bronson later noted, in "bad taste. There was no doubt about that." At the time, other artists were addressing the disease didactically in their work, in contrast to the more ambiguous statement General Idea made with AIDS.

Despite the initial reaction to the work, General Idea went on to create a series of projects around their AIDS logo, producing these in diverse media, from posters to stamps to rings. They advanced this logo to raise awareness about and combat the stigma and misinformation surrounding AIDS. Bronson stated, "Part of the hook of it for us was the fact that it involved so many issues, not only health issues, which were especially acute in the U.S., but also issues of copyright and consumerism." The artists also continued to raise funds for AIDS charities through initiatives such as General Idea's Putti, 1993, a large-scale installation created from a commercially available seal pup-shaped hand soap placed on a beer coaster. Ten thousand of the soaps were assembled to create a gallery installation and were available for viewers to take, with the suggestion to leave a \$10 donation for a local AIDS charity.

The significance of General Idea's activism cannot be understated. At the time AIDS was a taboo topic surrounded by fear. Speaking to the climate of the era, artist and writer John Miller explained, "In 1987 especially, identifying oneself as HIV-positive differed from coming out. You could lose your job and your friends. Others still might want to quarantine you. Even obituaries skirted all mention of the disease."

In the late 1980s General Idea's AIDS work took on personal significance. One of the group's closest friends (who helped in producing Going thru the Motions, 1975–76, and Test Tube, 1979) died of AIDS-related causes in 1987 in New York. The group served as primary caretakers for the last weeks of their friend's life. Partz and Zontal were diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1989 and 1990, respectively. Both artists publicly disclosed their status and, until their deaths in 1994, General Idea continued to create poignant and engaging artwork addressing AIDS. (Smith 2016, ACI).

In 1994, General Idea's collaboration concluded with the deaths of Zontal and Partz from AIDS-related causes. Bronson continued to produce work and in the wake of the loss of Zontal and Partz and produced works in tribute to General Idea.

Watch this short video about the AIDS Memorial Quilt.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthhistories/?p=142#oembed-2>

In what ways is this activist project similar to General Idea's AIDS works? In what ways does it approach AIDS in a different way?

## Violence meets vulnerability



Tom Magilery, *Image of activists at the Vancouver Climate Strike Rally on October 25, 2019 at the Vancouver Art Gallery*. Flickr. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

At the 2019 Climate Strike Rally at the Vancouver Art Gallery, thousands of demonstrators gathered to listen to environmental activists Greta Thunberg and David Suzuki, and to promote their belief that urgent action is necessary to ensure the survival of people on this planet. Many of the ralliers carried cardboard placards championing their views—"Listen to the science," "There is no planet B"—but others brought banners or wore T-shirts emblazoned with the name and cry of the Indigenous protest movement Idle No More. This use of banners and T-shirts within the context of a protest is not novel. Textiles — selected for their malleable, durable, and accessible properties — have long been used by activists to convey social and political messages within the public sphere. Examples abound: the abolitionist quilts stitched by anti-slavery organizations in the antebellum United States; the collection of coffin-sized blocks that raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and commemorate those lost to the disease through the AIDS Quilt (1987-); the embroidered and appliquéd banners advocating for women's suffrage crafted and carried by members of the British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the early 20th century; the appliquéd panels (arpilleras) depicting the atrocities suffered by Chilean citizens under the reign of dictator Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s. Artists too have engaged with textiles as an effective medium for relaying activist ideas; Canadian artists Barbara Todd and Barbara Hunt have used the fibre arts to articulate anti-war sentiments and critique militaristic policies.

Barbara Todd, *Security Blanket: 57 Missiles* (detail) (1989). Quilted and appliquéd wool, 278 x 270 cm.

Created at the tail end of the Cold War, Barbara Todd's *Security Blanket: 57 Missiles* (1989)— one in a series of security blankets produced in the 1980s and 1990s—features fragments of grey, blue, brown, and black woollen suiting cut to echo the shape of military projectiles. These shapes are fixed to the quilt's surface using the appliqué technique, a needlework technique commonly used in quilting, but which has historically been used to attach fabric pieces that together illustrate flowers, baskets, and birds. The materials, palette, and imagery of Todd's quilt thus allude to Western masculinity, aggression, technology, and the military-industrial complex, while the method of assembly draws upon techniques associated with domesticity, craft, and Western femininity. By fusing these elements together, Todd creates a jarring juxtaposition that highlights the distinct and often opposing systems of value that operate simultaneously in Canadian culture, and posits an anti-war message. As Marni Jackson argues, by "placing these fear-filled, totemic shapes inside a larger pattern, the benign grid of the quilt, their menace is to some extent neutralized. They become mere vocabulary. . . Bombs are reduced to mere 'decorative' elements" (Jackson 1993).

Barb Hunt, *Antipersonnel* (1998-2010). Knitted cotton, polyester, and wool, size varies. Collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre and The Rooms Art Gallery.

Artist Barb Hunt similarly pulls on this notion of contrast in her series *Antipersonnel*, which consists of a sequence of to-scale knitted and crocheted replicas of anti-personnel landmines in various shades of pink yarn. Sparked by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, which was signed in Ottawa in 1997 and calls on signatories from the global community to end the production, storage, and use of landmines, Hunt's work offers a meditation on human ingenuity and the many tools that have been created to ensure the destruction of human life.

Each landmine is carefully stitched in detail. Hunt has attentively articulated the mechanisms and triggers that figure into the construction of the actual objects, contrasting the mechanical and technical attributes of the landmines with the handmade qualities of knitting and crochet.

Examples of landmines in the Cambodia War Museum, Siem Reap, 2012. Photo: Gary Todd.

The fluffy, pink forms of Hunt's landmines, which conjure stereotyped ideas of femininity—"girl power!"—also sit uneasily with the intended function of the objects depicted. Designed to rip bodies asunder, landmines are

completely removed from the notions of domesticity, comfort, and care suggested by the work's materiality. However, at the same time, Antipersonnel draws upon a long association between knitting and war.

John H. Boyd (photographer), Dorothy McCabe, Queenie Edward, and Edith Allen knitting in a Red Cross workroom, Toronto, 1943. Item 83771, Fonds 1266, City of Toronto Archives, Toronto.

During both the First (1914-18) and Second World Wars (1939-45), Canadian women, and sometimes men, knitted sweaters, socks, scarves, hats, and bandages for service members stationed overseas, as well as for those displaced by military occupation. As the image of Dorothy McCabe, Queenie Edward, and Edith Allen knitting in a Toronto Red Cross workroom suggests, their efforts—which, in the Second World War alone, generated some 50 million garments—were often coordinated by organisations like the Red Cross, the Women's Institute, or church groups (Canadian War Museum 2014).

Designs from Monarch Book No. 87: Hand Knits for Men and Women in Service. Dunnville, ON: Monarch Yarns, 1941. Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario.

While the production of knitted articles was, in the immediate sense, intended to fulfill an urgent need, makers and organizers were aware of the potential alternative readings embedded in these objects—the connection to care and a reminder of the domestic space of the home—as is alluded to in the opening pages of Monarch Knitting Company's book of Hand Knits for Men and Women in Service: "Hand knitting is an opportunity to express, in tangible form, care and affection for those who are dear. It is an opportunity to put idle time to profitable advantage, realizing that some airman, some soldier or some sailor (often unknown to you) will be made happier by your work." (Monarch Knitting Company 1941, 2). This fusion of violence with vulnerability, care with conflict reoccurs, not just in Hunt's work, but also in Barbara Todd's quilt, which melds an appliqué stockpile of armaments with the notion of a child's security blanket.

Hunt's and Todd's subversive stitches are not simply political for their anti-war messaging, for their use of craft and the domestic to neutralize objects of war, but for the very use of fibre itself—for the use of quilting and knitting, activities traditionally associated with women's domestic craft, in a high art context. Todd's security blankets are, for instance, displayed on the wall, not a bed, and Hunt's knitted replicas are frequently positioned on plinths or displayed within glass cases in gallery spaces. In this way, Antipersonnel and Security Blanket: 57 Missiles continue the politicization of fibre that became pronounced in North American feminist artistic practice in the 1970s, as makers and scholars sought to better understand women's creative contributions historically, and to repurpose "craft" mediums for art production in the present. As art historian Elissa Auther notes, "In this context, the once negative associations of fiber with femininity and the domestic realm were recast as distinctive and culturally valuable features of an artistic heritage specific to women" (Auther 2010, 96). Since this time, craft mediums have become an integral aspect of contemporary art practice; however, makers such as Hunt and Todd often still rely on the historical and seemingly unshakeable associations of fibre with the domestic, feminine, and handcrafted to give their work its charge: to protest war—and the hierarchies of art that historically limited women's participation in the professional sphere.

## Where hope meets action: Black Lives Matter

Natalie Wood, *I Can't Breathe* (2019) watercolour, acrylic and pen 18 ½ x 12 ¾ inches (private collection)  
<http://www.paulpetro.com/exhibitions/578-Tba>

"I am particularly interested in the counter-narratives, experiences and forms of resistance, marginalized peoples convey through media and other forms of popular culture." (Wood)  
<http://iamnataliewood.blogspot.com/p/artist-statement.html>



Trinidadian-Canadian Natalie Wood is an artist who has “waded into the sociopolitical discourse, using their creativity as a force for change.” (ACI [https://www.aci-iac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Art-Canada-Institute-Newsletter\\_Art-Activism-and-Politics-A-Canadian-Commentary.pdf](https://www.aci-iac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Art-Canada-Institute-Newsletter_Art-Activism-and-Politics-A-Canadian-Commentary.pdf)) In Wood’s semi-abstract watercolour *I Can’t Breathe*, she depicts herself surrounded by pale floating circles, disembodied hands float before her, words flow from them: “This cannot be how the story ends.” The poignant title of this work takes on increased significance in the aftermath of George Floyd’s May 2020 murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. The killing of Floyd in the US sparked calls to address anti-Black racism, which reverberated across the United States, Canada, and globally, leading to #blacklivesmatter protests.

Black Lives Matter groups were, in fact, established before 2020. In 2014, artist and activist Rodney Diverlus co-founded Black Lives Matter Toronto, and subsequently Black Lives Matter – Canada. According to their website, the group is a platform for dismantling all forms of anti-black racism, liberating blackness, supporting black healing, affirming black existence, and creating the freedom to love and self-determine, Diverlus saw the historic resurgence of BLM in the summer of 2020 as a breaking point, “Since then, Black artists across all disciplines have been speaking more boldly and urgently, sharing their personal experiences with the longstanding existence of anti-Black racism within Canadian arts industries and institutions.” He explains:

*The legacy of anti-Black racism persists in our museums, galleries, sets, recording studios, theatres, opera, and ballet institutions; in our “classical” companies and contemporary arts spaces; in digital and new media spaces; in commercial and non-commercial spaces; in every milieu. These examples are not outliers, but the standard. These institutions, in many ways, are functioning precisely as they were created to. Weaved into the foundations of arts institutions in this country is an innate othering of the Black experience. Indeed, there has never been a time in which these institutions have included our full personhood. What we are asking for is something that has never been seen before. The task at hand will require much imagination and sacrifice by those who have historically guarded the gates of these institutions.*

*Black art-makers, we have done enough to educate and to teach. Much of the past year has been about identifying what is not working for us — but now, in 2021 and beyond, we have an opportunity as Black art makers and arts-related professionals to set out a collective vision for Black arts in Canada; to identify solutions made for us, by us. We have an opportunity to decentre traditionally white arts institutions and whiteness as the standard. We have an opportunity to carve out a new era of “contemporary art” that properly reflects contemporary society and those who inhabit it.*

*And there is no time more apt than now to imagine new possibilities. We begin this year with the arts and cultural sector in the midst of the metamorphosis of our lifetimes. Thousands of artists remain without work, practices are being adapted and morphed, and storied institutions are closing their doors or teetering on the brink of collapse. As we enter new and uncharted territories, rather than expending all our energies, talents, fixing the bricks of the fortresses that spent so long keeping us out, let us build our own.*

Diverlus’ calls for more inclusive spaces for BIPOC artists is echoed by curator Pamela Edmonds’ assertion, “I am no longer interested in a seat at the table. I now want to build my own table.” (2019) Art Historian Joana Joachim locates Edmonds at the forefront of intersectional Black feminist curatorial practices in Canada:

*While large-scale museums in Canada rarely include Black artists in their collections and exhibitions, as evidenced by a 2015 study published in *Canadian Art*, Black women have been working in smaller institutions as artists and curators to address this exclusion. (Cooley, Luo, and Morgan-Feir, 2015) Indeed, for decades, exhibitions by and for Black women in Canada have led conversations about race, representation, settler colonialism, sexuality, and class, among other subjects. As underscored by Yaniya Lee in her article “The Women Running the Show,” the late 1980s saw the advent of the very first Canadian exhibition to centre Black women and their work. *Black Wimmin: When and Where We Enter* (1989) was also the first exhibition to be curated by Black Canadian women curators, namely Buseje Bailey and Grace Channer, members of *Diasporic African Women’s Art Collective (DAWA)*, a non-profit*

network of Black Canadian women founded in 1984. (Jim 1996) This travelling exhibition ushered in the 1990s, a decade that also saw the creation of CAN:BAIA (Canadian Black Artists in Action) (1992) and the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia (BANNS) (1992). In the late 1990s, curator Pamela Edmonds began her career co-curating *Skin: A Political Boundary* (1998) with Meril Rasmussen, who was a student at NSCAD at the time, and who is now an instruction designer focused on social networks for education and research. Edmonds has subsequently worked in several galleries across the country, including as the Exhibitions Coordinator at A Space Gallery, Toronto, and the Director/Curator at the Art Gallery of Peterborough. (Edmonds) The following decade was marked by such interventions as the exhibition *Through Our Eyes* (2000), curated by Edmonds and Sister Vision Press, as well as Charmaine A. Nelson's appointment as the first Black art historian in a tenure-track position at a Canadian University in 2003. Nelson's scholarly contributions continue to push the boundaries of Canadian art and history. (Joachim, 2018, 39)

Learn more about Pamela Edmonds' practice by watching her 2020 presentation at the conference *The State of Blackness: From Production to Presentation*.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=142#oembed-3>

Edmonds' statement inspired a panel discussion titled *How We Build: On Craft and Blackness* at MSVU Art Gallery in 2019. One of the speakers was artist Letitia Fraser. A graduate of NSCAD University, Fraser was born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her work centres around her experience as an African-Canadian woman growing up in North Preston, home to one of the oldest and largest Black communities in Canada.

Fraser's digital portfolio includes a pencil sketch of Viola Desmond. Now iconic for its inclusion on Canada's \$10 bill. (6 min video)

<iframe title="vimeo-player" src="https://player.vimeo.com/video/258147443?h=9051e951c8" width="640" height="360" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

In her resistance to segregation, and seminal role in the country's civil rights movement Desmond has often been compared to Rosa Parks. She was even the first historical woman of colour to be given a Heritage Minute in Historia Canada's collection.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=142#oembed-4>

In 2010 well after her death in 1965 Desmond was pardoned by NS's lieutenant-governor, Maryann Francis. Reflecting on the significance, Francis recalled, "Here I am, 64 years later—a black woman giving freedom to another black woman." Eight years later the Canadian federal government unveiled a historical vertical \$10 bank note featuring Desmond's portrait with a map of her north-end Halifax neighbourhood in the background.

Were you aware of the significance of the portraits on currency? Research some of the faces on that maybe on the bills in your wallet. Who is depicted? Who is not? Look into some of the other figures considered by the Canadian Mint and other countries.

Art historian Gabby Moser, describes the portrait of Desmond as an example of an “untaken photograph”:

*a category of images introduced by the Israel-born philosopher Ariella Azoulay that describes the power photography has in shaping how we imagine history, even if no photo is ever produced. A profound optimist, Azoulay is best known for arguing that photography initiates a contract between the subject, the photographer and the viewer that compels us to act. But Azoulay also argues that untaken photos can be used to help us to picture the past differently. When events like Desmond’s spontaneous act of defiance go uncaptured, we can use the pictures taken just before, just after or at the periphery of events to imagine what was not captured. (Moser 2019)*

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 11.7

Can you think of an example of another “untaken photo” related to activism in Canada? What would it have depicted? Why does it remain untaken?

Returning to Fraser’s work, one of her most striking images is *Virtuous Woman*. Painted in 2019 and featured in her solo show at the Mount St Vincent Art Gallery it depicts her great-aunt Liffian Downey, who helped raise her. In her unique practice she primes hand stitched quilts with rabbit skin glue and then paints her figures, with the quilt design shimmering below (Fraser 2020). In an artist statement she articulates the significance of quilting:

*I use, used fabrics in connection to the resourceful way my grandmother, Rosella “Mommay” Fraser, made quilts for her family. My Grandmothers quilting, to me, was survival for my family. It was less about decoration, and more about warmth and protecting those close to you. Her quilts, as well as the African American Gee’s Bend Quilters greatly influenced my quilts. My goal is to nurture my family traditions, honouring those before me in the process. (Fraser)*

Another important figure leveraging quilting to tell stories for communities is the archivist, arts administrator, and activist David Woods. He is the organiser of Nova Scotia’s first Black History Month (1984) and the founder of several arts and cultural organisations including the Cultural Awareness Youth Group of Nova Scotia (1984) and most significantly the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia (1992). In 1998 he co-curated “In This Place: Black Art in Nova Scotia” at NSCAD’s “Anna Leonowens Gallery, a survey of the art from one hundred years of Black artists in the province. By uncovering these histories, “Woods created a sense of place, a way to teach emerging artists about the work of those who preceded them, whose legacies had largely gone undocumented and unpreserved.” (Adams, 2020)

READ about David Wood's contributions as an archivist and advocate here: <https://canadianart.ca/features/david-woods-black-history-decades/>

David Woods (design) and Laurel Francis (quilting) Preston, 2007. Pieced, appliquéd, machine- and hand-stitched, hand-dyed quilt with photo transfers, 1.47 x 1.32 m. Images on quilt courtesy the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia.

Woods and Francis' work is reminiscent of Faith Ringgold's story quilts which combine imagery with text within the quilted medium. The text here alludes to the community of Preston, Nova Scotia, near Halifax and one of the most historically significant communities of Black Canadians, originally settled by Black Loyalists. Accompanied by historical black and white images which are not only appliquéd to the surface, but which—as blocks—make up the fabric of the quilt itself Confident figure in contemporary dress – draws strength from the community? Similar to the figures depicted by Fraser.

In 2012, along with his colleagues at BANNs, Woods curated “The Secret Codes: Contemporary African Nova Scotian Narrative and Picture Quilts.” The exhibition featured 25 quilts by members of the Vale Quiltmakers Association from the New Glasgow area of Nova Scotia, and explored quilting as a vehicle for storytelling. According to the exhibition, ‘The Secret Codes’ “refers to the use of quilts as a subversive medium to guide escaping slaves to the Underground Railroad.” Historians debate whether this actually occurred; however, quilting is an important art form within African American cultures—from Harriet Powers pictorial quilts, which fuse Christian narratives with Fon symbolism and Abomey appliquéd techniques to the pieced quilts of found/salvaged materials crafted by Loretta Pettway, Mary Lee Bendolph, and other quilters—many the descendants of enslaved individuals—living in rural Gee’s Bend, Alabama to the story quilts of Ringgold and the contemporary work of Sanford Biggers, who reinvents antique quilts through the application of paint or ornamentation, or by reshaping them to tell a new narrative.

Nearly ten years later the exhibition has been revived for a cross-country tour in 2022 with shows at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery (Charlottetown, PEI), the National Black Canadians Summit (Halifax, NS), the Quilt Canada National Conference, (Halifax, NS), and the Textile Museum of Canada (Toronto, ON).

Filmmaker Sylvia D. Hamilton, lauds his contributions to the community, noting Woods “has worked tirelessly for years to uncover early Black artists in Nova Scotia — to say, ‘Yes, we have always created art, and here are the artists. . . . It is rare to find a visual artist who undertakes such curatorial work, and at the same time does his own work.” (Parris 2018). Hamilton herself is an important storyteller contributing to the ongoing vitality of Black communities. Her 2007 documentary *The Little Black School House* addresses the often forgotten history of Canada’s racially segregated school systems. Drawing on her own experiences in an All-Black school in Beechville, Nova Scotia, Hamilton expresses her motivation for documenting this “historical amnesia” reflecting in an interview with Brianne Howard and Sarah E.K. Smith, “It was essential for me to try to capture as many of these experiences on film as possible. So those who lived it would have some validation of what they had experienced, and so those who denied that this existed or those who had no idea, would be able to see.” (Howard and Smith 2010, 64-65)

She continues on to explain her method:

*Repurposing photographs and archival footage to use in a new manner is an important aspect of my work. Aesthetically, it was the archival footage that enabled audiences to see inside these schools, and I think this helped to concretize the memory for anyone who has attended one of these schools. This was also important for those who deny that segregated schools ever existed in Canada, as it builds a case of visual evidence. Another important part of my aesthetic strategy was the locations where I shot new footage of the old schools, often with former students returning to these locations. The old buildings*

became “sites of memory,” to use Pierre Nora’s term, and the buildings had embedded stories that I wanted to bring to light in the film. The way I structured the narration was to personify the building, to evoke those memories so that the building itself becomes a storyteller (Howard and Smith, 2010, 64-45).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=142#oembed-5>

The Little Black School House from Cinema Politica on Vimeo.

One example is this poster created by Sade Alexis in 2021, for Gordon House in celebration of Black History Month. In an Instagram post she shares “ I had the pleasure of working with the folks at @gordonhouse who commissioned me to make a piece about the late Rosemary Brown for BHM! This piece has been printed as posters and put up around the Gordon Neighbourhood house area!

The poster features a stylized portrait of Brown, adorned with flowers from her homeland of Jamaica. Below the image is a quote by Brown: “When I fight for your freedom I am also fighting for my own freedom, and when I am fighting for my freedom I am fighting for my sisters’ and my brothers’.”

It carries on to share a brief bio: Rosemary was a Black Feminist, politician, writer, educator, mother and community leader. She worked tirelessly for the Black community of Vancouver as the first Black woman elected to the BC legislature. Miss Brown was responsible for bringing civil rights legislation into BC parliament, and along with this she worked to open up housing options and employment opportunities for our community here on these lands. Rosemary was, and is, an integral part of our community; she stood for the uplifting of Black people as a means of uplifting all people. As the descendant of slaves, Rosemary worked hard to make her ancestors proud, which is why this month, and every month, we honour and remember her for all she has done for us.

#### LEARNING JOURNAL 11.8

Spend a few minutes looking closely at the poster of Rosemary Brown. What do you see? Write a description of the form, content, and context of the work.

The illustrator, Sade Alexis “shares that her drive to draw has evolved along with her lived experience as a Black person.” For her, “Drawing and art have also always been a way for me to do something about the way I feel about Blackness. It started as a way for me to deal with the pain we experience. As I’ve grown as an artist and a Black woman, it’s been a way to cultivate my love for my Blackness and my community.” (Johnson 2021).

Sade Alexis on Portraiture:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/?p=142#oembed-6>

When we make a portrait of someone we're telling the viewer that the person in this portrait is important, the person in this portrait deserves to be understood, they deserve to be looked at, they deserve to be thought about. (youtube video)

Alexis' work was recently featured in an exhibition at the Royal BC Museum. Created in partnership with the BC Black History Awareness Society, "Hope Meets Action: Echoes Through the Black Continuum" was curated, written, designed by Black voices to reclaim and retell "the complicated history of stolen people on stolen land, and how the contributions of Black leaders echo across the centuries into the present."

She recognizes the significance of representation: "It's important for us to see depictions of ourselves and to learn our history from our own people, to go to an exhibition for us, by us," she says. "This exhibition is also important because it's disrupting the predominantly white Royal BC Museum. The museum has been historically a space dominated by white narratives, or narratives of BIPOC history as told to us by white people. By having this exhibition, we are forcing ourselves into this space, not to fit within it but to tear it down and build anew." (Johnson 2021)

Curator and activist Joshua Robertson, a founding member of the Hogan's Alley Society, an organisation that works to redress the displacement of people of African Descent and to advance their social, political, economic, and cultural well-being. Joshua's research, advocacy and consultancy focus on the centering of racialized communities in city planning, alternative economic models of inclusion, social enterprise development and redress based urban design principals.

Joshua Robertson (3 minutes)

<iframe width="500" height="281" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/tM\_mpbsEqzs?list=PLN9Hdj6yjKtWBotNqOGmv858xP0KaWhTe" title="YouTube video player" frameborder="0" allow="accelerometer; autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture" allowfullscreen></iframe>

He writes of protest and Black activism:

*We as Black people have always had to fight for our rights, for our community and for our story. From the time we stepped onto Turtle Island, we have fought for the acknowledgement of our inherent right to freedom and liberation. From the start of our journey in 'British Columbia' we saw the mass of Black protestors at 'Victoria's' docks, demanding the release of enslaved boy Charles Mitchell, held captive in 1863. Countless community organizing and direct-action efforts have been waged, such as the 1923 mobilization of Hogan's Alley's Black community around Fred Deal, a man whose murder conviction and sentence to hanging for the death of a white police officer was seen as racially motivated. As the year of reckoning that was 2020 is an indication our voice will not be further silenced. To this day we grip the handle of our future tighter. We have never been mistaken about our inalienable right to liberation, and as descendants of survivors, we bear the responsibility to keep fighting.*

ENGAGE with the exhibition here: <https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/hope-meets-action/>

Read: <https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/hope-meets-action/read/>

Watch: <https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/hope-meets-action/watch/>

Look: <https://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/hope-meets-action/look/>

### LEARNING JOURNAL 11.9

Select one of the images from the Hope Meets Action: Pictures From the Past exhibition. Write a detailed analysis of the image reflecting your learning from this course.

### LEARNING JOURNAL 11.10

What change would you like to see in the world? As a final reflection activity in this module, consider how art could be used to advance an issue you care about. Identify one issue that you would like to address. How exactly could you use art to address this issue? Finally, reflect on any limitations to this approach.

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# OBJECT STORIES



# article (1979—)

*by* Amber Berson

**COMING SOON**

# Biinjiya'iing Onji (From Inside) (2017)

*by* Hana Nikčević

**COMING SOON**

# "A Cheap Farm House" (c. 1864—)

by Jessica Mace

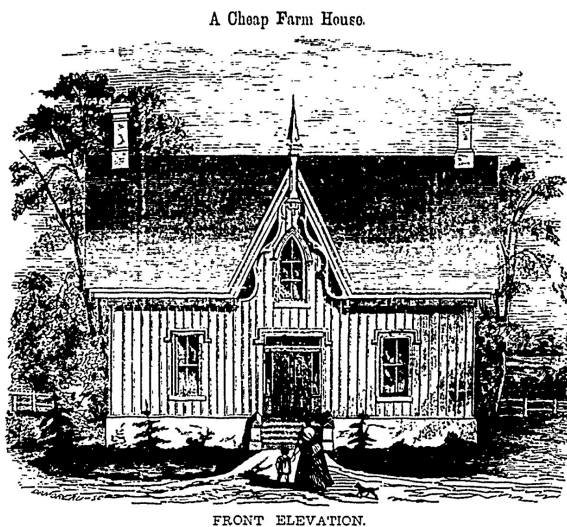


*"A Cheap Farm House," near Markdale, Ontario. Photograph: Peter Coffman, 2021.*

When you walk through any town in Ontario, Canada, or drive down any of its rural roads, if you look closely at the old houses, you'll notice that many bear a striking resemblance to one another. This is no accident. In the nineteenth century, as **settler development** expanded across the territory, architectural plans were circulated in print for prospective homeowners. The purpose of the published designs was so that anyone could build a comfortable and attractive home, with local materials, even in remote places that were beyond the reach of trained architects. Although labeled as a farm house, the design for "A Cheap Farm House" became popular in both the country and the city.



## The Canada Farmer



Elevation, "A Cheap Farm House," *The Canada Farmer* 1 no. 22 (November 15, 1864): 340. *Canadiana*.

The house pictured above stems from a design published in *The Canada Farmer* in November of 1864 called "A Cheap Farm House."<sup>1</sup> Founded this same year by George Brown, the owner and publisher of the *Globe*, the bi-weekly periodical was dedicated to agricultural interests. The publication was founded on the belief that the future prosperity of Canada was closely tied to its agriculture, part of the larger settler-colonial project extended to the construction and appearance of rural homes.<sup>2</sup>

"Architecture is perhaps a complimentary word when used in reference to most of the structures which have been erected upon the farms of Canada," wrote *The Canada Farmer*, and for this reason, the periodical intended "to do somewhat toward improving the style of rural architecture in Canada."<sup>3</sup> The aim of *The Canada Farmer's* editors and authors was to spread what they perceived as good taste and architectural ideals to those in

rural areas beyond the reach of architects, who mostly lived and worked in big cities. From its very first issue, the journal featured a series on rural architecture that included general advice, but more importantly, architectural drawings, cost estimates, and instructions for construction to help the average person build a house. The "Cheap Farm House" elevation that we see here was attractive but also simple enough to be easily achievable without an architect.

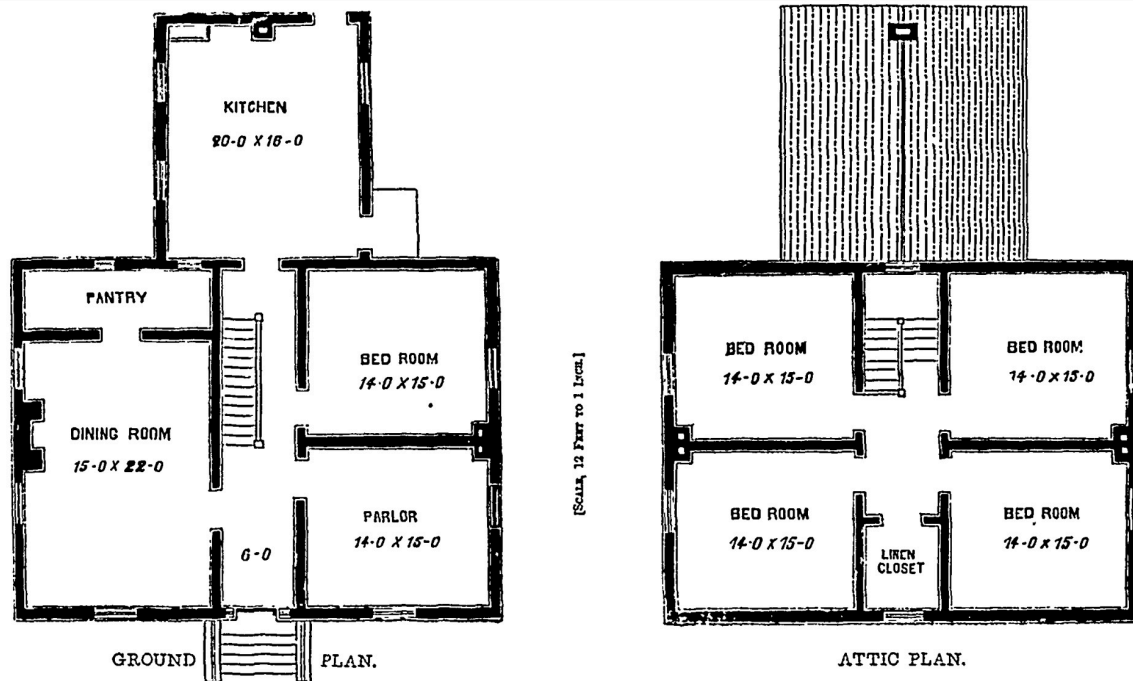
### "A Cheap Farm House" model

The designs for the various houses printed in the pages of *The Canada Farmer* were created by James Avon Smith, a budding Toronto-based architect who would go on to have a prolific career. Although a number of models in different styles were published, "A Cheap Farm House" was one of the most popular. Its simple form was easy to recreate and to modify, even in the absence of an architect. It made use of the most basic form for a building, using simple techniques drawing on the vernacular—that is, local knowhow and traditions—so that any builder could execute this design.

1. "Rural Architecture," *The Canada Farmer* 1, no. 22 (November 15, 1864): 340.

2. "To the Farmers of Canada!" *The Canada Farmer* 1 no.1 (January 15, 1864): 8.

3. "Canadian Farm Architecture," *The Canada Farmer* 1, no. 1 (January 15, 1864): 7.



Plan, "A Cheap Farm House," *The Canada Farmer* 1, no. 22 (November 15, 1864): 341. *Canadiana*.

Built on a simple rectangular plan, the home rises two storeys in height. The façade is defined by a steeply pitched roof and a central window, framed by a **gable**. There is also a windowless cellar, intended for food storage. The interior layout is divided simply and symmetrically with a central hallway and staircase. Each room is accessible from this central corridor. The kitchen at the back of the house was considered optional, or at least its construction might be postponed to make the initial cost of the house more affordable. Kitchens did not hold the same essential role in the home as they do today. They were often placed in outbuildings to reduce fire risks, to temper heat in the summer, and to keep objectionable cooking smells away from the main house. Similarly, without indoor plumbing and sewage infrastructure, until the turn of the century (and sometimes even later) houses like this would have an outhouse instead of a bathroom.



*220 Centre Street North, Whitby, ON. Photograph: Jessica Mace.*

The instructions stated that this model could be built either of brick or of wood, depending on locally available materials and the budget of the soon-to-be homeowner. The design was made even more customizable with the option of a veranda, shutters, and a picket fence.





29 Guelph Street, Georgetown, ON. Photograph: Jessica Mace.



Window and veranda detail, 81 Main Street, Unionville, ON. Photograph: Jessica Mace.

Beyond these modifications as outlined in the design brief, in practice, the pointed (or Gothic) window used in the central gable was often converted to a round-headed or squared window. Similar liberties were taken with the wooden **bargeboard** and **finial**, which could either be further embellished or omitted entirely. Overall, the cost of the model as

presented in the pages of *The Canada Farmer* was estimated at \$600 to \$800 if made of wood.<sup>4</sup> This is roughly \$10,500 to \$14,000 CAD today.

## Printed media and the built environment

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the small house became a matter of direct architectural concern in industrializing nations, including in the British colonies that would later come to be known as Canada. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution social structures changed dramatically, calling for more variety in domestic architecture, and for smaller, affordable housing in particular. It also made building materials more affordable and easier to transport. Also at this time, print technology and distribution made it easier and more affordable for publications of all kinds to be printed and circulated. Both of these important social and economic factors changed the architectural industry in practice and in print.

British culture held considerable cultural and political sway in Canada throughout the 19th century. British architects had already turned their attention to the cottage providing detailed advice, plans, and cost breakdowns speaking directly to the growing middle class. Publications called **pattern books** were pioneered by Scottish landscape gardener John Claudius Loudon in 1832 with *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture, and Furniture*. The format became a popular and affordable way to spread architectural knowledge and taste. Similarly, around this time, architectural periodicals were established that gave advice for architects, builders, and tradespeople, but also for average people with an interest in architecture. Like pattern books, they also occasionally offered models for small homes. Examples include the influential British periodicals *The Builder* (est. 1843) and *The Building News* (est. 1854), which were circulated to the British colonies, including the territory now known as Ontario.

## Why Gothic?

The prominent pointed window and the wooden bargeboard in *The Canada Farmer* design link this tiny home to the **Gothic Revival** trend. This was one of the most popular architectural movements of the nineteenth century, spreading like wildfire in the English-speaking world in particular. First emerging in England in the early eighteenth century, Gothic Revival architects looked to late medieval Gothic architecture for inspiration.

4. "Rural Architecture," *The Canada Farmer* 1, no. 22 (November 15, 1864): 340.





*The Centre Block, Canadian Parliament building, with the Peace Tower in front, 1859–66. Ottawa, Ontario. Photograph: Saffron Blaze. CC BY-SA 3.0.*

Gothic architecture's popularity would inevitably impact Canadian popular taste, but also because most of the colony's earliest architects were trained in England. Like in England, Gothic was used most notably in church architecture and in prominent secular buildings like the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

As time wore on, the Gothic style was used for smaller, less architecturally significant buildings too. This is because Gothic was believed in the nineteenth century to be the most adaptable of architectural styles. Understood then as a counterpoint to classical architecture, Gothic was seen to have fewer precise rules. For example, a classical Doric temple must follow exact plans, geometry, and measurements. Architects and patrons thought of classical design as harder to translate to different contexts without careful consideration. On the other hand, Gothic could be

communicated with only a steep roof and a bit of simple ornamental detail (the pointed window, the bargeboard, or finial). And so, the Gothic Revival provided a path toward an affordable, stylish statement for small houses, and one that was well adapted, because of its steep roof, to shedding heavy snow fall. These are some of the reasons that these minimal Gothic designs caught on in Ontario.



*36–40 Amelia Street, Toronto, ON. Photograph: Jessica Mace.*

## A versatile model



54 Spruce Street, Toronto, ON. Photograph: Jessica Mace.

The Gothic design of “A Cheap Farm House” was not just popular in rural areas—we also find many examples of this model and related models in towns and cities across the province. This was particularly the case for those building in bulk or building speculatively to sell. There are many such homes even in Toronto, Ontario’s largest city.

“A Cheap Farm House” and *The Canada Farmer* acted as a connective thread in the architectural fabric of the province, speaking to a moment in time, and to a desire for style and comfort. This modest house fits into an important network of architectural ideas in Canada and beyond, demonstrating that the trajectory of architectural knowledge in the nineteenth-century was not always straightforward.

Next time you are out wandering, take a look at the old houses. There is much more behind their design than meets the eye.

### About the author

Jessica Mace, Ph.D., is the current Postdoctoral Fellow in Canadian Architecture and Landscapes in the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto. Her research explores concepts of modernity and heritage in the architecture of the nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth centuries, particularly in housing and in industrial contexts in Canada. Since 2015, she has been the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* and currently serves as Secretary on the Executive Committee of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies. She also serves as adjunct faculty in both the Department of Urban and Tourism Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Graduate Department of Visual Art and Art History at York University.

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# Dididaht Legend of Swans and Wolves (c. 1995)

*by Carolyn Butler Palmer, with Carmen Thompson*

**COMING SOON**

# The Elevated Wetlands (1997-98)

by Mark Cheetham



Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands*, 1997-98, Taylor Creek Park, Toronto. Six sculptures made of expanded polystyrene foam, acrylic stucco coating, solar powered irrigation system, recycled plastic soil structure, native plants, and water from the Don River. Commissioned by the Canadian Plastics Industry Association in cooperation with the City of Toronto. The sculptures were officially inaugurated October 1, 1998. Photograph: Mark A. Cheetham, 2009.

Six elephantine shapes stand—or do they graze?—in two groups, one on either side of one of Canada’s busiest highways, the Don Valley Parkway in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> The grey forms are gigantic (approximately 2-3 meters); they seem alive and unperturbed by the traffic, yet also like creatures from a prehistoric past. Visually intriguing, the artwork becomes even more compelling the more one knows about its innovative creation—it is largely made from forms of plastic—and its environmental purpose.

## Where and why

*The Elevated Wetlands* stands in Taylor Creek Park, an oasis of wetlands in the expansive Don Valley, named for the once heavily polluted Don River that runs through the east part of Toronto and into Lake Ontario. Named Wonscotanach in Anishnaabemowin (also called the Ojibwe language), this glaciated valley registers layers of environmental and human history, from the course of the river and its tributaries and still-thriving original plants, to traces of Indigenous settlements more than 5,000 years old and the nineteenth-century mills and brickworks that helped to build the infrastructure of North America’s third largest urban area. Completed in 1998 by well-known Toronto artist Noel Harding in collaboration with landscape architect Neil Hadley, the work was the result of extensive civic planning, local consultation, and partnership with the plastics industry.<sup>2</sup>

1. Jennifer Bonnell, “Writing the Environmental History of Toronto’s Don Valley Parkway,” *NiCHE*, November 14, 2011

2. Shawn Micaloff, “Remembering artist and urban innovator Noel Harding’s legacy,” *Toronto Star*, June 18, 2016.

## Functioning eco art

*The Elevated Wetlands* is one of the first and most enduringly effective pieces of **eco art** in Canada. *Elevated Wetlands* is a working water filtration system. Water from the adjacent wetlands is steadily pumped to the top of the chain of sculptures by solar voltaic systems (solar panels attach adorably to the backsides of some of the “elephants”). Gravity then takes the water through a simple filtration system. Treated waste from plastic bottles, automobile plastics, and shredded consumer plastics cooperates with local wetland flora atop each form to absorb and filter chemicals and other contaminants. A much cleaner sample of stream water is then returned to the soil beside the Don River. An affirmative example of the potential “green” collaboration between industry, art, and civic planning, the sculptural group is also clearly art because it is so unusual and more than strictly functional. The plastic sculptural structures topped with plants interact with one another organically, as groups of animals often do. Nose to tail, they are intimate, tactile, and purposeful. Most of all, the groups strike one as playful.

## Questions raised: Practicality and/versus aesthetics in eco art

Pioneering in its sculptural presence and its green agenda, *The Elevated Wetlands* continues to serve as a unique water filtration apparatus, an example of collaboration and an aesthetically captivating installation. As plastic becomes more and more of an environmental burden in the present, the work not only suggests but also puts sustainability into practice. Or does it? The sculptures do function, but slowly. Alone, they cannot significantly purify the Don wetlands, nor were they intended to. Harding was not providing a water filtration prototype suited to similarly polluted areas at scale, similar to the power-generating windmills we see in some locales. *The Elevated Wetlands* is practical—ameliorative—in a symbolic way. As eco art, the work raises issues and demonstrates solutions. If it were strictly practical, it would no longer be art. Yet *The Elevated Wetlands* continues to pose environmental questions in part because—hurtling past it on the highway or admiring it close up—most people don’t register the forms as “art” at all. Its environmental message sneaks up on the viewer.

*The Elevated Wetlands* is familiar to many Torontonians, but its international importance has been overlooked. Delivering what many today want from eco art—aesthetically engaging art that carries a clear environmentalist message—it is an early example of the environmentally sensitive art which artists have been increasingly taking up in the USA and Europe since the 1990s. In presenting sustainability rather than providing habitat restoration on a large scale, *The Elevated Wetlands* can be compared with the eco art projects of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison, which began in the 1970s and continue. The Harrisons describe themselves as “historians, diplomats, ecologists, investigators, emissaries and art activists.”<sup>3</sup> Though not a functioning work in Harding’s sense, their *Greenhouse Britain* (2007–09), for example, was a large-scale and



Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands*, 1997–98. Photograph: Robert Taylor, 2009. CC BY 2.0.

3. The Harrison Studio, 2022, <https://theharrisonstudio.net/>.

multi-platform artwork that demonstrated the effects of accelerating planetary warming on the coastlines of the UK. Another fruitful comparison with Harding's work is Hans Haacke's *Rhine Water Purification Plant* (1972). Downstream from the Krefeld sewage treatment plant, he collected still-polluted water, which he purified so that goldfish could survive in the large water tank central to his installation. More politically motivated than *The Elevated Wetlands*—the artist was calling out the water treatment company, which was a donor to the art museum—Haacke's cleansing apparatus was installed indoors for two months at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany.

## Eco art and public art

These three works have a strong aesthetic impact and also ask what eco art can be and do *as art*. A notable difference between *The Elevated Wetlands* and many other eco artworks, however, is that Harding's work is also a prominent and permanent piece of public art. It does not filter or control its audiences in the way that museum exhibits inevitably do. *The Elevated Wetlands* was designed to be and remains part of the elaborate web of civic, technological, and aesthetic discussions and controversies that uniquely attend public art. As public art, it continues to pose environmental questions to a broad range of people through an unusual and laudable combination of ecological insight, technological savvy, and whimsy. It is a work for its immediate locale, for the past of this environment and its peoples, and for the future of the planet.

### About the author

Dr. Mark Cheetham is a professor of Art History at the University of Toronto who specializes in modern and contemporary art. He has published broadly on a number of topics, including ecocritical art history. His most recent book is *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature since the '60s* (Penn State UP 2018).

### Further reading

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# Les milieux humides surélevés (1997-98)

par Mark Cheetham



Noel Harding, *The Elevated Wetlands (Les milieux humides surélevés)*, 1997-98. Taylor Creek Park, Toronto. Six sculptures composées de mousse de polystyrène expansé, d'un revêtement de stuc acrylique, d'un système d'irrigation à énergie solaire, d'un substitut de sol en plastique recyclé, de plantes indigènes et d'eau de la rivière Don. Commandées par l'Association canadienne de l'industrie des plastiques en collaboration avec la ville de Toronto. Les sculptures ont été inaugurées officiellement le 1er octobre 1998. Mention de source : Mark A. Cheetham, 2009.

De part et d'autre de l'une des autoroutes les plus fréquentées du Canada, la Don Valley Parkway à Toronto, se dressent – ou broutent-elles? – six formes éléphantines réparties en deux groupes<sup>1</sup>. Gigantesques (environ 2 à 3 mètres), ces formes grises semblent vivantes et évoquent des créatures sorties tout droit de la préhistoire, imperturbables malgré le trafic routier. Visuellement fascinante, cette œuvre exerce un attrait d'autant plus profond que l'on en sait plus sur sa création audacieuse – elle est en grande partie réalisée à partir de formes de plastique – et sur son objectif écologique.

1. Jennifer Bonnell, « Writing the Environmental History of Toronto's Don Valley Parkway », *NiCHE*, 14 novembre 2011.

## Où et pourquoi

*Les milieux humides surélevés* se dresse dans Taylor Creek Park, véritable oasis de milieux humides située dans la vallée Don, nommée ainsi d'après la rivière du même nom, autrefois très polluée, qui traverse la partie est de Toronto et se jette dans le lac Ontario. Connue sous le nom de Wonscotanach en langue anishnaabemowin (ojibwé), cette vallée glaciaire recèle une riche histoire écologique et humaine – le cours de la rivière et ses affluents, les plantes indigènes florissantes, les traces de campements autochtones remontant à plus de 5 000 ans ou les moulins et briqueteries du dix-neuvième siècle qui ont contribué à construire l'infrastructure de la troisième plus grande zone urbaine d'Amérique du Nord en sont autant de témoins. Achievée en 1998 par le célèbre artiste torontois Noel Harding en collaboration avec l'architecte paysagiste Neil Hadley, l'œuvre est le résultat d'une longue planification urbaine, d'une consultation locale et d'un partenariat avec l'industrie du plastique<sup>2</sup>.

## Art écologique fonctionnel

*Les milieux humides surélevés* compte parmi les premières œuvres d'**art écologique** au Canada et l'une des plus durables (l'art écologique se penche sur l'environnement « naturel », au sens large, et explore les interactions entre les êtres humains, les animaux et les matériaux dans cet espace). *Milieux humides surélevés* est un système de filtration d'eau fonctionnel. L'eau des milieux humides adjacents est pompée régulièrement vers le haut de la chaîne de sculptures grâce à des systèmes photovoltaïques solaires (des panneaux solaires sont adorablement fixés à l'arrière-train de certains des « éléphants »). L'eau s'écoule ensuite par gravité à travers un système de filtration simple. Les déchets traités provenant de bouteilles en plastique, de plastiques automobiles et de plastiques de consommation déchetés coopèrent avec la flore des milieux humides locale au sommet de chacune des formes pour absorber et filtrer les produits chimiques et autres contaminants. Un échantillon beaucoup plus propre d'eau est ensuite retourné dans le sol près de la rivière Don. Exemple catégorique de collaboration « verte » potentielle entre l'industrie, l'art et l'urbanisme, l'ensemble sculptural est également une production artistique manifeste de par son caractère insolite et parce qu'il n'est pas purement fonctionnel. Les créations de formes en plastique surmontées de plantes interagissent les unes avec les autres de manière organique, comme le font souvent les groupes d'animaux. Du nez à la queue, elles sont intimes, tangibles et significatives. Mais surtout, ces groupes sont ludiques.

## Questions soulevées : L'aspect pratique et/ou esthétique de l'art écologique

Pionnière par sa présence sculpturale et son programme vert, *Les milieux humides surélevés* demeure un équipement de filtration d'eau unique, un exemple de collaboration et une installation esthétiquement captivante. À l'heure où le plastique devient un fardeau environnemental de plus en plus lourd, l'œuvre fait plus que suggérer la durabilité, elle la met en pratique. Mais est-ce bien le cas? Les sculptures fonctionnent, mais lentement. Elles ne peuvent à elles seules purifier perceptiblement les milieux humides de la Don, et ce n'était pas leur raison d'être. Harding ne poursuivait pas l'objectif de fournir un prototype de filtration de l'eau qui pourrait ensuite peupler à grande échelle des zones polluées similaires, à l'instar des éoliennes qui

2. Shawn Micallef, « Remembering artist and urban innovator Noel Harding's legacy », *Toronto Star*, 18 juin 2016.

produisent de l'énergie dans certains endroits. *Les milieux humides surélevés* est pratique – amélioratif – sur le plan symbolique. En tant qu'œuvre d'art écologique, l'ensemble sculptural expose des problèmes et propose des solutions. S'il ne présentait qu'un intérêt purement pratique, ce ne serait plus de l'art. Mais *Les milieux humides surélevés* continue de soulever des questions environnementales, en partie parce que la plupart des gens, qu'ils passent en trombe devant l'œuvre sur l'autoroute ou qu'ils l'admirent de près, ne se rendent pas du tout compte qu'il s'agit « d'art ». Le message environnemental qu'elle porte se laisse découvrir à l'improviste par la personne spectatrice.

Si *Les milieux humides surélevés* est bien connue des Torontois, son importance internationale a été négligée. L'œuvre, qui offre ce que beaucoup attendent aujourd'hui de l'art écologique – un art esthétiquement attrayant qui porte un message écologique clair –, constitue l'un des premiers exemples de l'art issu d'une démarche environnementale de plus en plus adoptée par des artistes aux États-Unis et en Europe, à partir des années 1990. En présentant la durabilité plutôt qu'en fournissant un outil de restauration du milieu à grande échelle, *Les milieux humides surélevés* se compare aux projets d'art écologique que produisent Newton et Helen Mayer Harrison depuis les années 1970. Les Harrison se décrivent comme des « historiens, diplomates, écologistes, investigateurs, émissaires et artistes activistes<sup>3</sup> ». Bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas d'une œuvre fonctionnelle au sens de Harding, leur création *Greenhouse Britain (La Grande-Bretagne sous l'effet de serre)*, 2007-2009, par exemple, est une installation multimédia de grande envergure qui démontre les effets de l'accélération du réchauffement planétaire sur les côtes du Royaume-Uni. On peut également établir une comparaison féconde entre l'œuvre de Harding et celle de Hans Haacke, *Rhine Water Purification Plant (Installation de purification des eaux du Rhin)*, 1972. En aval de la station d'épuration de Krefeld, l'artiste a recueilli de l'eau polluée qu'il a ensuite purifiée afin que des poissons rouges puissent survivre dans le grand réservoir d'eau au centre de son installation. D'un caractère plus politique que *Les milieux humides surélevés* – l'artiste interpelle la société de traitement des eaux, qui a fait un don au musée d'art – l'équipement de purification de Haacke a été installé à l'intérieur pendant deux mois au Haus Lange du musée d'art de Krefeld, en Allemagne.

## Art écologique et art public

Ces trois œuvres, à fort impact esthétique, posent également la question de ce que l'art écologique peut être et peut faire en tant qu'art. Une différence notable entre *Les milieux humides surélevés* et de nombreuses autres œuvres d'art écologique, cependant, est que la création de Harding constitue aussi une pièce d'art public importante et permanente. Elle ne filtre ni ne contrôle son public comme le font inévitablement les expositions des musées. *Les milieux humides surélevés* a été conçue pour s'inscrire, et s'inscrit toujours, au sein du réseau élaboré de discussions et de controverses sur l'aménagement urbain, la technologie et l'esthétique qui entoure l'art public. En tant qu'art public, l'œuvre continue à susciter une réflexion environnementale chez des gens aux horizons divers grâce à une combinaison inhabituelle et digne de louanges de perspicacité écologique, de savoir-faire technologique et de fantaisie. C'est une œuvre pour son environnement immédiat, pour le passé de cet environnement et de ses habitants, et pour l'avenir de la planète.

### À propos de l'auteur

Mark Cheetham est professeur d'histoire de l'art à l'Université de Toronto et spécialiste de l'art moderne et contemporain. Il a publié de nombreux ouvrages sur un certain nombre de sujets, dont l'histoire de l'art

3. The Harrison Studio, 2022, <https://theharrisonstudio.net/>.



écocritique. Son livre le plus récent s'intitule *Landscape into Eco Art : Articulations of Nature since the '60s* (Penn State UP 2018).

**Pour aller plus loin**

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# The Elgin Trays (1847-54)

by Linda Sioui and Annette de Stecher



*Marguerite Vincent Lawinonkié, Lord Elgin's tray (calling card tray), Huron-Wendat, Northeastern Woodlands, 1847-54. Birch bark, moose hair, cotton thread. Height 5.2 cm, Length 31.0 cm, Width 39.0 cm. Photo by Stéphane Laurin. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History, Elgin collection, 2008.118.10.*

The Elgin trays illustrate the important role moosehair and quill-embroidered bark works played: as an innovative adaptation of Wendat traditions of diplomacy, designed to meet the changing circumstances of European presence. They illustrate continuity in visual arts traditions, the agency of women, and the ability of the Wendat to strategically adapt their diplomatic and commercial affairs in times of change

The Elgin trays are made of birch bark, with complex embroidered arrangements of leaves and floral motifs framing Lord and Lady Elgin's initials and their coats of arms, worked in moosehair and porcupine quill. The trays date between 1847 and 1854 and are attributed to Marguerite Vincent La8inonke, although she may have commissioned another artist in the community. The artist demonstrates her creative confidence in these rich compositions. The interconnected elements form harmonious color arrangements, with a strong sense of life and movement.



*Marguerite Vincent Lawinonkié, Lord Elgin's tray (calling card tray), Huron-Wendat, Northeastern Woodlands, 1847-54. Birch bark, moose hair, cotton thread. Height 5.2 cm, Length 31.0 cm, Width 39.0 cm. Photo by Stéphane Laurin. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History, Elgin collection, 2008.118.9.*

One tray is embroidered with the initials of Lady Elgin, M. L. E. (Mary Louisa Elgin), and the other is embroidered with the initials of Lord Elgin's titles, E. K. (Elgin and Kincardine). In Lord Elgin's tray, each side panel has a border of small green leaves. In the centre panel, the initials of his title, E & K, Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, are

embroidered under an earl's coronet, surrounded by a garland of lavender thistles and white and pink flowers, stitched with fine detail in an exquisite example of the naturalistic floral style.

In Lady Elgin's tray, the initials of her title appear in the central panel below an earl or countess's coronet. These initials may stand for Mary Lambton Elgin, Lambton being Lady Elgin's family name before she married. The heraldry in this tray is as exact as in Lord Elgin's, and the floral motifs of the same high naturalism. The blossoms, stems, and leaves are balanced in a play of light and dark colors, with heavy and light forms that create rhythm through regular repetition, all in gentle, constant movement. The blue trumpet-like flower seen in Lady Elgin's tray is probably the convolvulus. The border of maple leaves represents the colors of the seasons: pale green, dark green, and autumnal shades. As in Lord Elgin's tray, in the centre panel a border of small green leaves provides edging around a garland, in this tray formed by groupings of blue convolvulus, strawberry fruit and flowers, what may be a rose at the top centre. The three strawberries are at different stages of ripeness.

The floral motifs in the two trays may have symbolic meanings. The thistle is the emblem of Scotland and of the Order of the Thistle. Lord Elgin was Scottish and a member of this order of chivalry. The strawberry in Lady Elgin's tray may refer to Wendat spiritual beliefs. Strawberries are of great significance in Wendat ancestral customs, rituals and cosmology, their symbolism continuing today.

These heraldic motifs are highly unusual in the tradition of Wendat moosehair-embroidered bark work. The iconography of the trays, the heraldic imagery, the association of floral motifs expressing Wendat traditional beliefs with floral motifs symbolizing European nations, and the negotiations that were taking place in this period between the colonial government and Indigenous communities, place these trays within the sphere of Wendat diplomacy.

### **Wendat artists**

Wendat women artists of Wendake, Quebec were renowned from the 18th century and continuing today for their moosehair and quill embroidered artwork. Their ancestral homeland was located in the Georgian Bay area, close to Lake Simcoe in what is today Ontario, as well as along the shores of the Saint Lawrence River. Originally, the Wendat were a farming people who grew corn, squash and beans – which they called the “Three Sisters” as well as tobacco. They would relocate their villages about every ten to fifteen years (Trigger, 1976, p. 36), settling approximately 30 kilometres away, to allow the soil of crop lands to replenish.

The total Wendat population at the beginning of the seventeenth century (the contact period), was approximately 29,000 souls (Trigger, 1976, p. 30). The main dwelling of this matricentric society was the Longhouse. On average, 50 to 100 Longhouses made up each village. The Wendat nation was comprised of four nations (Bear, Deer, Rock and Cord) distributed among several villages. A fifth nation (Swamp) joined later. French explorer Samuel de Champlain called this semi-sedentary and agricultural people “Huron,” referring to the tuft of hair on a wild boar's head the nation's warriors' hairstyle reminded them of.

In 1649-50, the Wendat Confederacy split up into several groups, some being adopted by the Haudenosaunee and other neighbouring nations. Others made their way westward to the Petun (or Tionnontati), a “cousin” Nation, to later form the “Wyandot”. Meanwhile, Wendat converts to Christianity found refuge on Yahoendoe (known today as Christian Island). In 1650, they arrived in the surroundings of Québec City. They settled at the Sillery mission, where a group of their own were established since 1637, and on Île d'Orléans, Sainte-Foy, Beauport and l'Ancienne-Lorette, before finally settling in 1697 on the site currently known as Wendake, which their descendants continue to inhabit (Étienne-Thomas Girault de Villeneuve, 204-209).

“The Hurons who settled in the region of Québec City in 1650 resumed their customary livelihood system,” noted Denys Delâge in reference to the Jesuit Relations published in 1651 (Delâge, 2000, p. 35 [our translation]). However, by the early 18th century, the Wendat had begun shifting from their longstanding agricultural practices to hunting, fishing and the harvesting of medicinal plants. From the 1700s, they adapted and borrowed some of the French culture while nevertheless remaining distinct in their identity.

At the start of the 19th century, Euro-Canadian settlers began dispossessing the Wendat of their lands. Wendat women realized their livelihood would be threatened and developed their traditional crafts and know-how into commercial wares, to bring a new source of income. At the same time, the village of Lorette, later

called Village-des-Hurons and today known as Wendake, became a popular tourist spot for the many visitors who flocked to Quebec City. The Wendat people were busy producing utilitarian objects such as moccasins, mittens, snowshoes, ash baskets and souvenirs, which they sold to visitors. Over time, the Wendat women maintained the refined quality of their work and embroidery with moosehair dyed in different colours dominated production. Sometimes on leather, sometimes on red or black fabric and even on birch bark, moosehair embroidery became a specialty and the objects produced became more and more elaborate. Towards the second half of the 19th century, thanks to the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship of Marguerite “Lawinonkié” Vincent, a Wendat woman, the production of Tourist Art increased to such an extent, ensuring Wendat families a livelihood.

### **Marguerite Vincent La8inonkie**



*Dessin, Madame Paul Picard, née Marguerite Vincent. Dessinateur: Ludger Ruelland. c. 1865. Fusain sur papier. Musée de la civilisation, photographe: Nicola-Frank Vachon Perspective Photo, 2006-986\_220221.*

Marguerite Vincent Lawinonkié, the half-sister of Grand Chief Nicolas Vincent Tsawenhohi and wife of Paul Picard Hudawathont, was born at the Bay of Quinte on the north shore of Lake Ontario in 1783. She is of Wendat origin. An outstanding craftswoman, she mastered and taught moosehair embroidery to other Wendat, and excelled at decorating clothing and objects for sale. This technique combined the traditional use of naturally dyed moose hair with embroidery techniques, a product of intercultural exchange between Wendat girls and women and Ursuline convent nuns. This technique was widely used in the 19th century as an ornamental technique for men and women's clothing.

### **Diplomatic Guests: Lord and Lady Elgin visit Chief François-Xavier Picard Tahourenche**

Lord and Lady Elgin met Chief François-Xavier Picard Tahourenche on both formal and informal occasions. On a formal political level, Chief François-Xavier Picard made a visit at the head of a deputation to the Château St. Louis in Quebec in January 1852, where he delivered an oration to Lord Elgin. In June 1852, Lord and Lady Elgin were received in the Picard family home, where they would probably also have met Marguerite Vincent. This was the former home of Grand Chief Nicolas Vincent and was a central meeting point for diplomacy and exchange. It was a place where princes, heads of state, ambassadors, Governors Generals, and commercial entrepreneurs were formally received. As part of a long tradition of welcoming dignitaries within the Wendat nation since time immemorial, the Elgin trays are an embodiment of these ancestral customs.

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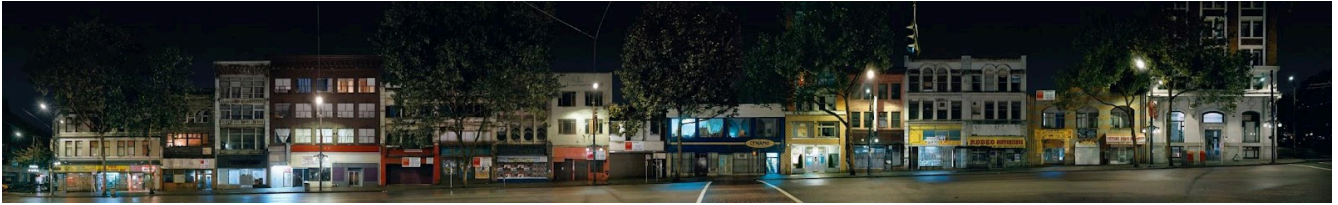
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# Every Building on 100 West Hastings (2001)

by Gabrielle Moser



Stan Douglas, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, 2001. Chromogenic print, 66 x 426.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York. All rights reserved.

How do we picture a shifting urban landscape constantly on the verge of disappearing? Stan Douglas's 14-foot-long **panoramic** photograph of one block of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighborhood addresses this difficulty, documenting every building in exacting detail. But just as important in Douglas's photograph is what goes unseen and uncaptured by the camera: the human subjects that usually populate the street, the pressures of real estate speculation on housing, and the shifting identity of the city in the lead-up to the 2010 Olympic Games. Though the image is a careful study of a specific place, the photograph offers us evidence of how Vancouver is impacted by global forces that are shaping city streets everywhere.

## Gentrification, protest, and the landscape

Taken at night and theatrically illuminated with soundstage lighting, *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* captures an otherwise unremarkable city block with remarkable clarity. The neighborhood pictured has been called "the poorest postal code in Canada" and is the site from which dozens of women, many of them Indigenous, have disappeared (the remains of many of them were subsequently discovered on convicted serial killer Robert Pickton's farm in 2002). Vancouver has prospered in the past few decades thanks to international trade and the success of the tech and film industries, but the Downtown Eastside neighborhood operates as a point of contrast for the rest of the city, where poverty, homelessness, drug use, and sex work have increased as the divide between the rich and poor deepens.<sup>1</sup>

Digitally stitched together from twenty-one separate photographs, Douglas's panoramic view of the block would be impossible to replicate with natural sight. With the camera aimed squarely at each building façade, the image allows us to take in the entirety of the streetscape without bending the horizon line, or losing focus. Its massive scale encourages our eye to skip along the length of the street, noticing that hotels, pawnshops and convenience stores are the most common surviving businesses, while six lots are either for sale or lease by realtor Fred Yuen, hinting at the economic downturn the neighborhood has experienced. Handmade signs in shop windows advertise closing sales, pawnshops offer to "buy, sell, or trade" goods, convenience stores

1. See Jeff Sommers and Nicholas Blomley, "The Worst Block in Vancouver," in *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, ed. Reid Shier (Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2002), 19–58.

announce ATMs and cheap cigarettes, and two closed circuit cameras surveil the left-hand street corner outside Jaysons Food Market.

At the time Douglas made the image, the neighborhood was on the verge of another change, however, represented by the coming of the Olympic Games to Vancouver in 2010. Fierce debates were raging between residents, city officials and real estate developers about whether it would be possible to “clean up” the Downtown Eastside in time for the international event, and over the future of the Woodward’s department store, located immediately across the street, behind Douglas’s camera. Closed due to increased competition from American big-box stores, local residents occupied the building to demand it be converted into affordable housing rather than condominiums, culminating in a standoff between police, developers and local activists in 2002 known as Woodsquat. *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* does not picture these events, but by devoting such large-scale attention to a neighborhood whose future was contested, Douglas’s image raised questions about the value of the landscape for local communities (a community that includes the artist himself, whose studio is located only three blocks from the site of the photograph).

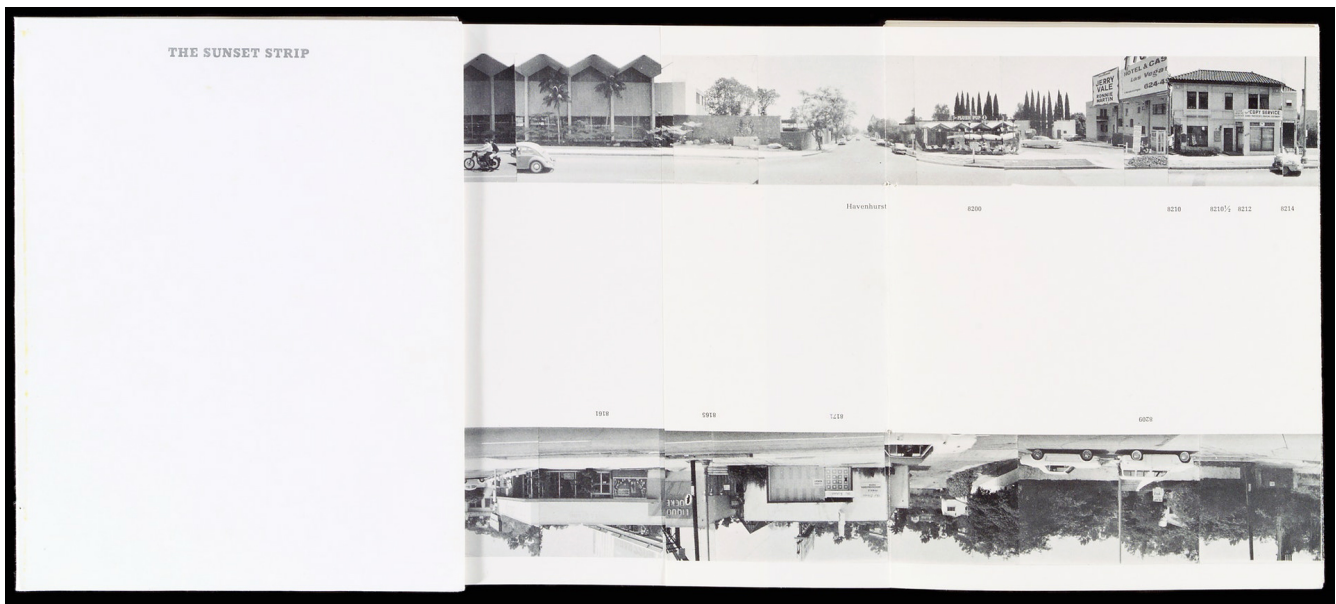
## Missing bodies and the ethics of documentary photography

Unlike photojournalistic images of the neighborhood, which show sidewalks busy with cars and people, Douglas photographs an empty West Hastings Street. While this is usually a bustling street, even late at night, the artist blocked off the sidewalk with city permits to photograph its sidewalks empty of people. If you look closely, temporary “no parking” signs dot the lampposts in the image.

Without human subjects in the scene, the photograph recalls documentation of Hollywood film sets and studio constructions of city façades, referencing Vancouver’s history as “Hollywood North,” an affordable stand-in for American cities in movies and television series. But removing the neighborhood residents from the camera’s gaze is also a response to decades-long questions about the ethics of street photography, particularly when documenting poorer urban areas. The Downtown Eastside was often depicted in news media across Canada at the time Douglas was working, but while photojournalists frequently turned the camera’s lens towards the neighborhood’s unhoused residents, the artist purposely removes them from view. By obscuring human subjects from his frame, Douglas avoids the potential of re-victimizing local residents, through the invasive view of the camera, as photographer Martha Rosler once famously argued in her landmark essay on the ethics of documentary photography in the Bowery neighborhood of Manhattan.

Some of the bodies missing from the block were forcefully disappeared, however, by police enforcement of anti-loitering laws, or more nefariously, drug overdoses and the disappearances and deaths of women involved in sex work. Douglas’s ability to control the movement of bodies across the streetscape has led several commentators to question if a problematic power dynamic is still at play between the photographer and his un-pictured subjects. It is telling that, in 2003, the Vancouver Book Award was presented as a tie between *Heroines* by Lincoln Clarkes—a series of black and white photographs, inspired by 1990s fashion advertising of unnamed women subjects in the Downtown Eastside—and a small catalogue devoted to *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* produced by the Contemporary Art Gallery: a tie that speaks to the charged place the Downtown Eastside occupied in citizens’ imaginations. While Douglas’s photograph imaged a city block that was poised to be transformed by unseen actors (either gentrified by developers or reclaimed by the community), Clarkes’s series seemed to re-center the neighborhood’s fate on its individual residents, using the established language of photojournalism to expose them as victims.





Edward Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966. Offset lithograph on paper in silver Mylar-covered box, 17.8 x 14.3 cm (.25 closed). Walker Art Center © Ed Ruscha.

## Conceptual photography in Vancouver

Though taken well before the invention of Google Street View, Douglas's image evokes a similar perspective of a city block as seen out the window of a car. This viewpoint is not accidental: the title and structure of Douglas's photograph is borrowed directly from a famous **photo book**, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, by American conceptual artist, Ed Ruscha. In his accordion-style fold-out book published in 1966, Ruscha took black and white photographs of every building along the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles and placed them side by side to create a panorama of both sides of the street. Though Douglas borrows Ruscha's title and structure for his image, his choice of aesthetic is strikingly different. While Ruscha was interested in making a banal, black-and-white document of vernacular architecture, copying amateur photography and inhabiting the role of the "non-artist" to challenge the artist-as-genius narrative of modernist formalism, Douglas borrows the visual language of commercial film studios to capture the block in vivid, full color detail. In this way, Douglas's photograph responds to the flow of ideas between West Coast conceptual artists, like Ruscha, and artists in the so-called **Vancouver School of photo-conceptualism**.

One of the hallmarks of the Vancouver School's approach is the use of cinematic conventions in fine art photographs. The theatrical lighting used in Douglas's nighttime image would be familiar to many Vancouver residents accustomed to seeing film crews cordoning off public space for television shows and movies. But unlike his contemporary, Jeff Wall, whose cinematographic photographs are often staged in Vancouver, but are not meant to depict Vancouver (or anywhere), in Douglas's photographs, the location plays itself. Detroit is Detroit, Cuba is Cuba, and Vancouver is Vancouver in Douglas's studies of the urban landscape. He nevertheless connects local conditions to global forces in each of these series, demonstrating the ways the landscape is transformed in response to the pressures of globalization, capitalism and urban renewal.

### About the author

Gabrielle Moser is an art historian, writer, and independent curator. She is the author of *Projecting Citizenship: Photography and Belonging in the British Empire* (Penn State University Press, 2019) and she is currently at

work on her second book, *Citizen Subjects: Photography and Sovereignty in Post-War Canada* (under contract with McGill-Queen's University Press). She is an Assistant Professor of Aesthetics and Art Education in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, Canada.

### Further reading

Learn about Woodsquat

Lincoln Clarkes's *Heroines*

Vancouver art in the 1960s

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# Grace Lake (1931)

by Isabelle Gapp

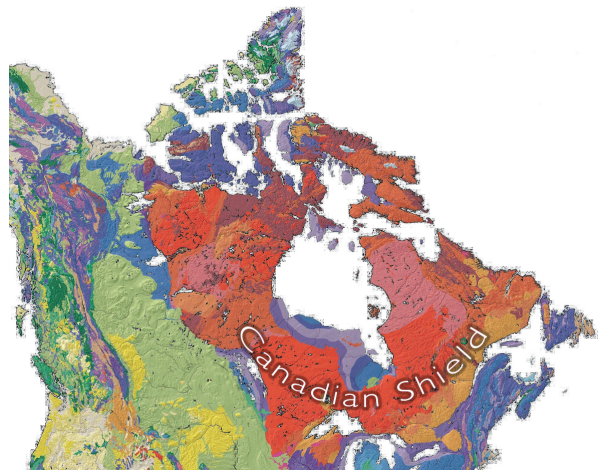


*Franklin Carmichael, Grace Lake, 1931. Oil on canvas, 102.87 x 123.19 cm. Original Picture Purchase Fund, circa 1931. The University College Collection, University of Toronto Art Collections, Toronto.*

Blue lakes, white hills, pink granite ridges, sugar maples, pine, cedar, oak, black cherry, and American beech fill the La Cloche mountains in Killarney Provincial Park on Georgian Bay in Ontario. This region is situated within the southern area of the **Canadian Shield**, which itself extends across much of western and northern Ontario. A patchwork of terrains and topographies define this coastal landscape.



Franklin Carmichael made his first trip to the La Cloche area of Killarney with several members of the **Group of Seven** in 1925. Members of the Group had first visited the Algoma region north of Lakes Superior and Huron in 1918 when they stopped off in the city of Sault Ste. Marie and later travelled by rail along the coastline. Later, in 1935, Carmichael constructed a cottage on the shores of Cranberry Lake, nestled in among the La Cloche mountains and the many other lakes, including Grace Lake, that inspired him.



*Map of North America showing the Canadian Shield.  
Qyd, Wikimedia Commons.*



*La Cloche Mountains, 2006, along the northern shore of Georgian Bay (Lake Huron) near Willisville, Ontario, Canada. Photo: P199. Wikimedia Commons.*

Taking a cue from current ecological and climate crises, we might begin to think art historically about the geological and environmental history of the Killarney region, in contrast to the preoccupation with wilderness and national symbols that have characterized Group of Seven scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Seen as breaking with European artistic traditions, the Group of Seven's paintings of the Canadian landscape were equated with social, cultural, and political meanings and ideals.

One legacy of the Group was founded not on the effects of modernization but rather the notion that their work represented Canada as quintessential empty and imposing wilderness. Joan Murray describes the bedrock of the Canadian Shield as "the fundamental basis of Canada."<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, I employ in the following essay an ecocritical approach that mobilizes multiple practices, including visual analysis, cultural interpretation, environmental history, and climate change discussions.

## A landscape of lakes

Although situated relatively inland from the archipelago of islands that are scattered along the north shore of Lake Huron, Carmichael's *Grace Lake* suggests the vast proliferation of lakes in and around the La Cloche mountains. The wider view of *Grace Lake* has been reimagined to suggest further lakes visible over the hills. *Grace Lake* itself is a gradient from almost pitch black to a metallic blue, concealing the point where it joins the lakes beyond. The same metallic finish continues throughout the receding composition, contrasting with the patchwork of quartzite and granite. Where considerable attention has been paid to the foreground and the stylized sky above, the imagined landscape beyond has been left comparatively plain and unadorned.

1. The institution of the National Gallery of Canada also played an instrumental part in bolstering support for the Group of Seven. From 1913 onwards, prior to their formation as a Group in 1920, the NGC, initially under the direction of Eric Brown, regularly bought their paintings and later incorporated them into international exhibitions on Canadian art. This affixed both the group and the landscape they painted as national symbols.
2. Joan Murray, *Rocks: Franklin Carmichael, Arthur Lismer, and the Group of Seven* (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2006), 25.



*Joachim Gauthier, Photograph of Franklin Carmichael sketching at Grace Lake, 1935. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON.*

Having first apprenticed at Grip Limited in 1911, a commercial art firm in Toronto, alongside others from the Group of Seven, in 1932 Carmichael left his job as a commercial artist to become the Head of the Graphic Design and Commercial Art Department at the Ontario College of Art. Graphic qualities are visible in his paintings, where an emphasis on pattern, delineation of form, and design emerge from his interpretation of the natural environment. The mountains are constructed as bulbous shapes rising from the reflective pools of water that are Grace Lake and the many surrounding bodies of water. The same curvilinear forms are mirrored in the clouds above, which billow across the sky.

In 1935, the artist and friend of the Group of Seven, Joachim Gauthier, took a photo of Carmichael, sat upon an exposed white quartzite rock while looking down on Grace Lake. The hooded figure of Carmichael is at work on a small

sketch, propped on a board within his paint box. This same vantage point reappears throughout his work. Surrounded by the La Cloche mountains, Grace Lake is a relatively small feature on the landscape, being only two kilometers long and a few hundred feet wide. Yet Carmichael's painting has expanded upon it to accommodate the extent of Killarney's many lakes.





Franklin Carmichael, *Snow Flurries, North Shore of Lake Superior*, 1930. Watercolor and gouache over charcoal on wove paper, 51.5 x 69 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

## Gradients of geological color

Uniquely among members of the Group of Seven, Carmichael worked primarily with watercolor and in 1925 co-founded the *Ontario Society for Painters in Watercolour*. *Grace Lake* is, however, an exception. Here, the effects of watercolor are manifested in oil paint. While Carmichael believed that watercolor offered the best expression of the Canadian light and landscape, in lecture notes he wrote, “It is influential that the artists reveal through the medium in which he is happiest, what he sees, thinks, and feels about his surroundings.”<sup>3</sup> The monumentality of *Grace Lake* is communicated through sinuous ribbons of oil paint, preserving the same qualities of light that Carmichael usually sought in watercolor.

3. Franklin Carmichael qtd. in Nicole Mari McKowen, “Transcendental Nature and Canadian National Identity: Franklin Carmichael’s Representation of the Canadian Landscape” (Master’s dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2019).

Formed nearly two billion years ago, the eroded ridges of the white quartzite hills of the La Cloche mountains were shaped by four different glaciers and then 11,000 years of wind and weather. Marked by higher elevations, sharp ridges, and terraced forests, the Killarney landscape is relatively inaccessible, and its distinct geological formations are thought to have once reached higher than today's Canadian Rocky Mountains. They do, however, remain among the highest peaks in Ontario. Among these white quartzite hills is the Dreamer's Rock, a sacred site for the Ojibwe, and the location of *The White Pine*, painted by Group member A.J. Casson.



A. J. Casson, *The White Pine*, c. 1957. Oil on canvas, 76 x 101.3 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON.

We should pause here to recognize the erasure of Indigenous sites and peoples from the visual history of the Canadian landscape more broadly. Such recognition is critical to de-colonizing the Group's work.<sup>4</sup> We must

confront the legacies of colonialism, and centre Indigenous perspectives that challenge constructed national identities that actively erase First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories and communities. Carmichael's *Grace Lake* sits on the traditional lands of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Peoples, yet any historic or contemporary human presence has been consciously removed. The Group of Seven's landscape paintings have instead been constructed around the idea of emptiness.

Throughout his visits to Algoma and Killarney, Carmichael's paintings reflected the light and color that bounced off the white quartzite hills and surrounding lakes. The artist and writer, Erika Alin notes the intricacies of the Canadian Shield, where "patches of pink, red, and black minerals [. . .] form endless interesting streaks and patterns, and delicate light pink lines extend like interlocking webs across the smooth black surfaces of scattered boulders."<sup>5</sup> The composition of *Grace Lake* is set into the granite and syenite of the Shield, painted in shades of grey, brown, yellow, and orange. Interspersed among the cliffs and rocky foreground, where a great abundance of metamorphic rock composes this never-ending coastal precipice, are patches of lichen, moss, and other vegetation.

Unlike *Grace Lake* in the foreground, the bodies of water beyond are bleached a silvery blue, removing any suggestion of weather from the water's surface. The clear blue of the water might also indicate ecological damage, notably acidification, caused by industrial mining, a prevalent industry in the region during the early twentieth century. Neighboring Nellie Lake, for example, known for its crystal-blue color, is so severely acidified that it can no longer sustain life.<sup>6</sup> The realities of environmental and **settler colonial** history, and the **geomorphology** of the Canadian Shield are revealed through Carmichael's varying application of color and his interest in form and shape. His use of colour and form in turn suggests Carmichael's own awareness of Ontario's distinct geology and ecology, with his work allowing him to explore the region's natural history and the human-induced impact of the timber and mining industries prevalent here since the nineteenth century.

4. See John O'Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

5. Erika Alin, *Lake Effect: Along Superior's Shores* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 70.

6. Justin A. Shead, "Chemical and Biological Recovery of Killarney Park, Ontario Lakes (1972-2005) from Historical Acidification" (Master's dissertation, Queen's University, 2007).



## From wilderness to industrialized landscape

The Ontario wilderness that the Group of Seven sought to represent had already been shaped by growing infrastructure—notably the construction of the railway—and the development and growth of towns and cities, including Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, along the northern shores of Lakes Huron and Superior. It no longer exemplified an understanding of wilderness as a barren and desolate space, far removed from civilization. Rather, the processes of modernization facilitated the Group's travels around Canada. There are few instances that signal the Group's awareness of environmental damage and destruction. However, the continued threat of logging on the landscape led to Carmichael and his colleague Alexander Young (A.Y.) Jackson lobbying Ontario's provincial government to establish Killarney as a protected area. Finally, in 1964 Killarney acquired the status of a provincial park.



Franklin Carmichael, *A Northern Silver Mine*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 121.2 cm. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, ON.

In the 1930s, Carmichael explored the theme of Ontario's industrial landscape. From the geological focus in Carmichael's *Grace Lake*, we might subsequently turn our attention to scenes of the Algoma mining industry

found in the work of Jackson, Carmichael, and Yvonne McKague Housser (wife of the art critic and friend of the Group Fred Housser).<sup>7</sup> The extractive processes of industrialization radically altered the geography and ecology of Ontario's landscape. During the mid-twentieth century, nickel mining and smelting damaged many of Killarney's lakes, including Nellie Lake and Cranberry Lake, which were repeatedly painted by Carmichael. The idea of a pristine wilderness stands to be challenged further, beyond recent scholarship, as it continues to disregard the environmental realities of Indigenous history, colonization, tourism, and industrialization.

Through Carmichael's *Grace Lake*, and others like it, these landscapes manifest as something other than representations of Canadian northernness and national identity. The emphasis on the use of light and color reveals the geology of the environment and the resulting ecological devastation caused by the natural resource industry. It moves away from a prevailing interest in nationalism, symbolism, and the wilderness. Such an ecocritical reading might be extended to depictions of wider Canada by the Group of Seven, and as such recontextualizes these paintings in line with environmental history at a time of unprecedented **anthropogenic** climate change.

### About the author

Isabelle Gapp is an Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto. She holds a PhD in History of Art from the University of York (2020). Her research considers the intersections between nineteenth- and twentieth-century landscape painting, gender, environmental history, and climate change around the Circumpolar North. Isabelle is the co-lead, alongside Professor Mark A. Cheetham, of the JHI Working Group Visual Cultures of the Circumpolar North (2021-2022) and serves as an editor for the Network in Canadian History & Environment (NiCHE). She is currently working on her first book, *A Circumpolar Landscape: Art and Environment in Scandinavia and North America, 1890-1930*, to be published by Lund Humphries as part of their Northern Lights series (forthcoming 2023).

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# Homage to Four in Paris (2017)

*by* Michelle Gewurtz

**COMING SOON**

# Ice Shove, Commissioner Street, Montreal (1884)

by Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere



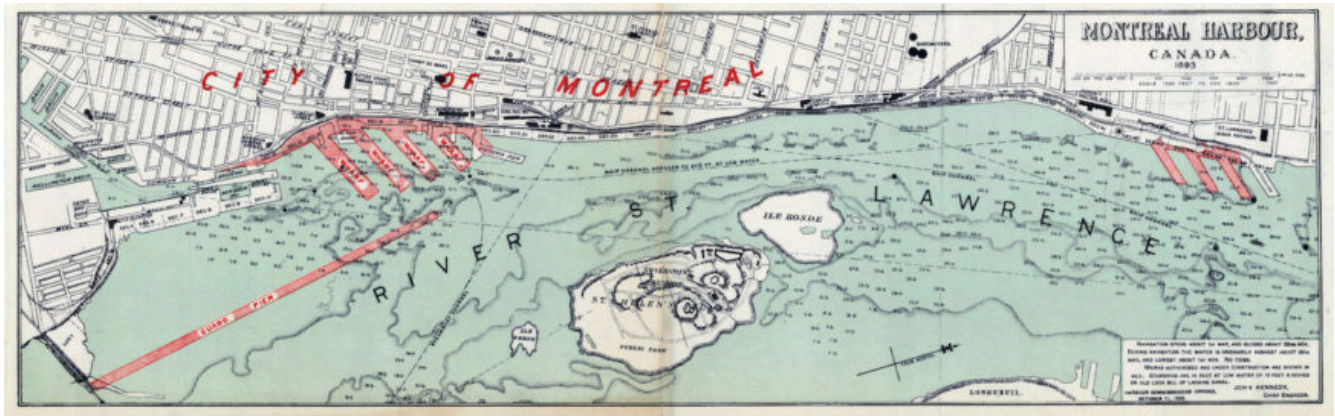
William Notman, *Ice Shove, Commissioner Street, Montreal, 1884*. Silver salts on glass, gelatin dry plate process, 20 x 25 cm. VIEW-1498, McCord Museum, Montreal, Quebec. CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 CA.

The movement of winter ice is so powerful that it can physically change the shape of waterways, destroy entire harbors, block key economic trade routes, and in the most devastating instances, take human life. One of the more spectacular forms of movement is an ice shove, which follows the total ice blockage of a river. Upward pressure from the rising water level behind the blockage forces the ice to suddenly and rapidly jut, or shove, outward. As water levels recede, they leave behind both the piled ice and a hollowed area underneath. But perhaps the greatest power of this natural force is the way it captures the popular imagination with equal parts wonder and fear as it is photographed and circulated in images such as William Notman's *Ice Shove, Commissioner Street, Montreal* from 1884.



## A harbour frozen over

In Notman's *Ice Shove*, large pieces of protruding ice fill the foreground as a massive rupture of the ice shove juts into the sky on the right side of the photograph. Posed atop that ice shove are more than a dozen indistinguishable figures standing triumphantly, as though they had summited a mountain peak. The small size of the figures reveals the enormity of the shove, which appears to reach the scale of the buildings along the left edge of the image. The ice pushes directly against the stone buildings that run the length of the port, emphasizing the harbour front's close call with total destruction.



Map of Montreal Harbour, 1893. Port Montréal.

Throughout the nineteenth century, from December to May, the port in Montreal, Quebec, along the Saint Lawrence River was blocked by ice and closed to shipping. While the economic heart of the city came to a frozen standstill, the ice gained popularity as a tourist attraction for those who were tempted by its danger and wanted to view its impressive formations. The shoves were a subject of wonder and fascination for the city's residents, but also for people who were curious about the dramatic stories of damage and peril. Photographs like Notman's offered viewers the ability to tour the shoves for themselves, just as we see those in the photograph doing, and were reproduced in many formats—books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, albums, keepsakes, and especially **postcards**—that circulated the images as far as the postal service could take them. Spectacular ice shoves warranted the effort of hauling cumbersome photographic equipment, including a heavy, large-format camera and tripod, as well as glass negatives and photographic chemicals, out into the elements—not just once, but every year that the ice shove occurred in the port.

## Notman and internationalism

Scottish-born, Montreal-based photographer William Notman operated a prolific studio business that catered to a range of photographic needs—from portraiture to collectible landscape scenes. The ice shove was a subject that he photographed several times as it occurred in the port throughout the years, a spectacular sight that was sure to be of interest to his clientele. His photographs were brought to the attention of Queen Victoria after Notman photographed her son, the Prince of Wales, in 1860. Soon after, Notman touted himself as “Photographer to the Queen,” which he had inscribed into the stone over his studio doors as a way to bolster his reputation. By 1865 he had set up studio branches throughout Canada and into the United States. As a result, he was among the first Canadian photographers to gain an international reputation.





William Notman & Son, *Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill*, 1885. Silver salts on glass, gelatin dry plate process, 17 x 12 cm. McCord Museum, Montreal. CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 CA.

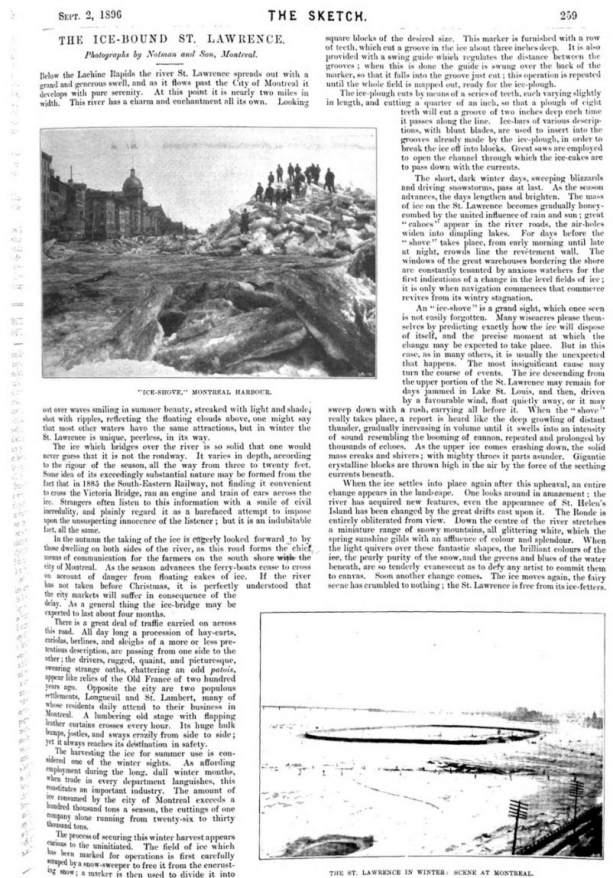
Like other commercial photographers in the late nineteenth century, Notman also photographed celebrities and events of public interest—including Buffalo Bill's **Wild West show** that made a stop in Montreal in 1885 on its nearly thirty-year tour of North America and Europe. In *Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill*, Notman famously captures Hunkpapa Lakota (Sioux) leader and former warrior-turned-performer **Sitting Bull** along with legendary plainsman and showman William “Buffalo Bill” Cody.

## Picturing a precarious port: The circulation of photographs

On October 30, 1869, Notman's portrait of Prince Arthur appeared on the front page of the inaugural issue of Montreal's *Canadian Illustrated News*. The photograph was reproduced as a Leggotype, a **halftone printing process** that enlarged, reduced, or reversed photographs for print publication in a way that would simulate a continuous gradation of tone. This technological feat cleared the way for highly detailed photographic reproduction to reach a wide-ranging audience through printed newspapers and periodicals.

Decades later, Notman's 1884 photograph of the ice shove was printed in the September 1896 issue of *The Sketch*, a popular British illustrated magazine, to accompany the story “The Ice-Bound St. Lawrence.” It casts the winter port vividly, with wonder and nostalgia:

Down the center of the river stretches a miniature range of snowy mountains all glittering white, which the spring sunshine gilds with an affluence of colour and splendour. When the light quivers over these fantastic shapes, the brilliant colours of the ice, the pearly purity of the



“The Ice-Bound St. Lawrence,” *The Sketch* 188, no. 15 (September 2, 1896), 259.

snow, and the greens and blues of the water beneath are so tenderly effervescent as to defy any artist to commit them to canvas.<sup>1</sup>

[ 20 ]



ICE "SHOVE," MONTREAL, BEFORE CONSTRUCTION OF GUARD PIER.

Notman's photo of the ice shove in Thomas C. Keefer, *Ice Floods and Winter Navigation of the Lower St. Lawrence* (Ottawa: J. Hope & Sons, 1898), 20.

In addition to its publication in *The Sketch*, which described the shove's spectacular presence and beauty, Notman's photograph also appeared in a government report (by Thomas C. Keefer) to document the disaster, as well as on postcards (such as the one below) produced by a variety of manufacturers over the next decade.

1. "The Ice-bound St. Lawrence," *The Sketch* 188, no. 15 (September 2, 1896): 259.



*"Montreal, Ice Shove." Postcard, Montreal Import Co. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.*

A similar postcard with a photograph taken by Notman of the ice shove in 1875 not only indicates an enduring interest in the phenomenon of the ice shove, but also a reflection of something quintessential about Montreal's resilience as a community with its caption: "Hearty Greetings from Montreal."



*"Hearty Greetings from Montreal, Ice Shove in Harbor," 1875. Postcard. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.*

Photographs such as Notman's offered spectacular views of popular events and scenes while also providing a way for people to imagine the failure or success of a Canadian city's ability to cope with the forces of nature.

### About the author

Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere is an adjunct lecturer at the Ontario College of Art and Design and Queen's University. From 2019 to 2021 she held a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship and from 2017 to 2018 she was the Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art. In addition to her interdisciplinary and collaborative research in pedagogical practices, she specializes in Canadian art histories with a focus on photographic and institutional histories. She has writing published in *Environmental History*, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review*, and *Journal of Canadian Art History*.

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# Débâcle, rue des Commissaires, Montréal (1884)

par Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere



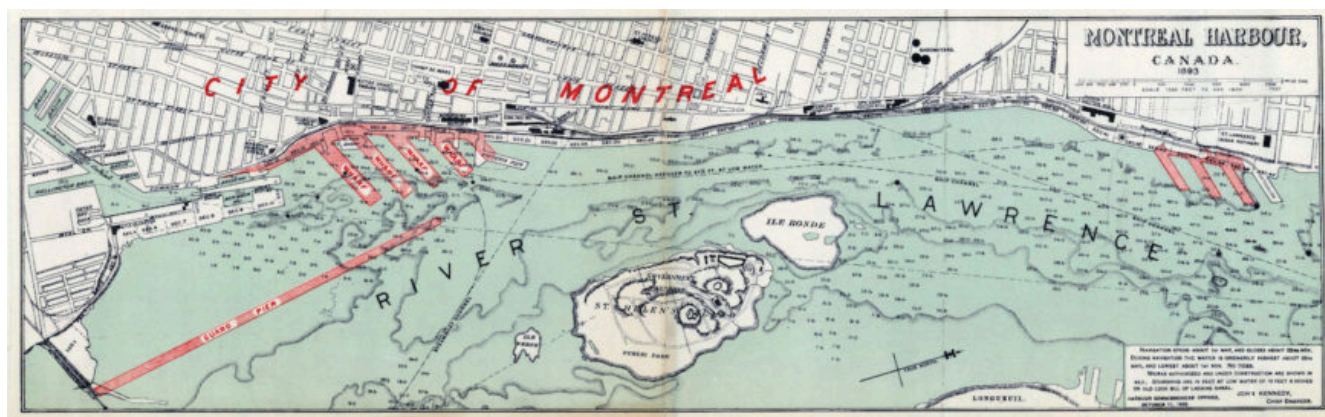
William Notman, *Débâcle, rue des Commissaires, Montréal, 1884*. Sels d'argent sur verre, plaque sèche à la gélatine, 20 x 25 cm. VIEW-1498, Musée McCord, Montréal. CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 CA.

Le mouvement des glaces hivernales est si puissant qu'il peut modifier la morphologie des voies navigables, détruire des ports entiers, bloquer les principales routes commerciales et, dans les cas les plus dévastateurs, prendre la vie humaine. L'une des formes de mouvement les plus spectaculaires est la débâcle qui suit la dislocation du couvert de glace d'un fleuve gelé, souvent accompagnée d'un embâcle obstruant complètement le cours d'eau. La pression exercée par la montée des eaux provoque la rupture subite du barrage de glace, les morceaux étant rapidement emportés par le courant. Le niveau des eaux redescend ensuite, abandonnant des amoncellements de glace sous lesquels se créent des espaces vides. Mais la plus grande puissance de cette force naturelle réside sans doute dans la façon dont elle frappe l'imagination populaire, inspirant aussi

bien l'émerveillement que l'effroi dans des images telles que *Débâcle, rue des Commissaires, Montréal*, immortalisée par William Notman, en 1884.

## Un port gelé

Dans le cliché de Notman, de grands morceaux de glace font saillie à l'avant-plan, alors qu'un amoncellement de glaces se détache contre le ciel, du côté droit de la photographie. Une douzaine de figures indifférenciables trônent, triomphantes, sur cet empilement, comme si elles avaient atteint le sommet d'une haute montagne. La petite taille des figures révèle la hauteur prodigieuse de l'amoncellement, qui semble rejoindre la cime des bâtiments visibles sur la gauche de l'image. Les glaces se butent aux bâtiments en pierre qui bordent le port, évoquant une catastrophe évitée de justesse, celle de la destruction totale de la façade portuaire.



Carte du Port de Montréal, 1893. Port de Montréal.

Tout au long du dix-neuvième siècle, le port de Montréal, situé sur le fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec, était bloqué par la glace et fermé à la navigation de décembre à mai. Alors que le cœur économique de la ville était paralysé par le gel, les glaces constituaient une attraction de plus en plus recherchée par la population, attirée par ses dangers et ses formations à couper le souffle. La débâcle était un sujet d'émerveillement et de fascination non seulement pour la communauté montréalaise, mais aussi pour les personnes curieuses de connaître les récits inouïs attestant des dégâts et des périls qu'elle représentait. Les photographies comme celles de Notman offraient au public la possibilité de juger du phénomène, tout comme le font les gens sur le cliché, et elles ont été reproduites sous différents formats — livres, magazines, journaux, brochures, albums, souvenirs et, surtout, **cartes postales** —, faisant circuler ces images aussi loin que la poste puisse parvenir. Spectaculaire, la rupture des glaces méritait l'effort de transporter un équipement photographique lourd et encombrant, tel qu'un appareil photo grand format et un trépied, ainsi que des négatifs sur verre et des produits chimiques pour la photographie, et d'affronter les éléments, non pas une seule fois, mais chaque année où la débâcle survient dans le port.

## Notman et l'internationalisme

Photographe né en Écosse et établi à Montréal, Notman exploite un studio florissant qui répond à un ensemble de besoins en images, du portrait aux représentations de paysage de collection. Au fil des ans, il photographie à plusieurs reprises la débâcle dans le port, un site remarquable qui ne manque pas d'intéresser sa clientèle. Ses

clichés sont portées à l'attention de la reine Victoria après qu'il eut photographié son fils, le prince de Galles, en 1860. Peu de temps après, Notman fait étalage du titre de « photographe de la reine », qu'il fait graver dans la pierre au-dessus des portes de son studio en vue de conforter sa renommée. En 1865, son entreprise compte des succursales au Canada et aux États-Unis et il devient l'un des premiers photographes canadiens à se tailler une réputation à l'échelle internationale.



William Notman & Son, *Sitting Bull et Buffalo Bill*, 1885. Sels d'argent sur verre, plaque sèche à la gélatine, 17 x 12 cm. Musée McCord, Montréal. CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 CA.

Comme d'autres photographes commerciaux de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, Notman immortalise des célébrités et documente des événements d'intérêt public, notamment le *Wild West Show* de Buffalo Bill, un spectacle à grand déploiement qui s'arrête à Montréal en 1885 dans le cadre d'une tournée en Amérique du Nord et en Europe qui durera près de trente ans. Avec son portrait *Sitting Bull et Buffalo Bill*, Notman se distingue en représentant le chef Hunkpapa Lakota (Sioux) et ancien guerrier devenu performeur, Tatanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull), en compagnie de l'homme de spectacle William Cody, dit Buffalo Bill, figure légendaire de l'Ouest américain.

## Images d'un port précaire : la circulation des photographies

Le 30 octobre 1869, la première édition du *Canadian Illustrated News* de Montréal arbore en première page le portrait du prince Arthur réalisé par Notman. L'image est reproduite par leggotypie, un procédé qui permet d'agrandir, de réduire ou d'inverser des photographies pour les publier en demi-teintes, simulant la gamme de tons entre le noir et le blanc. Cette prouesse technologique ouvre la voie à la reproduction photographique

de qualité et permet aux journaux et aux périodiques imprimés de rejoindre un large public.



## THE ICE-BOUND ST. LAWRENCE.

Photographs by Notman and Son, Montreal.

Below the Lachine Rapids the river St. Lawrence spreads out with a grand and generous swell, and as it flows past the City of Montreal it develops with pure serenity. At this point it is nearly two miles in width. This river has a charm and enchantment all its own. Looking



"ICE-SHOVE," MONTREAL HARBOUR.

out over waves smiling in summer beauty, streaked with light and shade, shot with ripples, reflecting the floating clouds above, one might say that most other waters have the same attractions, but in winter the St. Lawrence is unique, peerless, in its way.

The ice which bridges over the river is so solid that one would never guess that it is not the roadway. It varies in depth, according to the rigour of the season, all the way from three to twenty feet. Some idea of its exceedingly substantial nature may be formed from the fact that in 1885 the South-Eastern Railway, not finding it convenient to cross the Victoria Bridge, ran an engine and train of cars across the ice. Strangers often listen to this information with a smile of civil incredulity, and plainly regard it as a barefaced attempt to impose upon the unsuspecting innocence of the listener; but it is an indubitable fact, all the same.

In the autumn the taking of the ice is eagerly looked forward to by those dwelling on both sides of the river, as this road forms the chief means of communication for the farmers on the south shore with the city of Montreal. As the season advances the ferry-boats cease to cross on account of danger from floating cakes of ice. If the river has not taken before Christmas, it is perfectly understood that the city markets will suffer in consequence of the delay. As a general thing the ice-bridge may be expected to last about four months.

There is a great deal of traffic carried on across this road. All day long a procession of hay-carts, carriages, berlines, and sleighs of a more or less pretentious description, are passing from one side to the other; the drivers, rugged, quaint, and picturesque, swearing strange oaths, chattering an odd *patois*, appear like relics of the Old France of two hundred years ago. Opposite the city are two populous settlements, Longueuil and St. Lambert, many of whose residents daily attend to their business in Montreal. A lumbering old stage with flapping leather curtains crosses every hour. Its huge bulk bumps, jostles, and sways crazily from side to side; yet it always reaches its destination in safety.

The harvesting the ice for summer use is considered one of the winter sights. As affording employment during the long, dull winter months, when trade in every department languishes, this constitutes an important industry. The amount of ice consumed by the city of Montreal exceeds a hundred thousand tons a season, the cuttings of one company alone running from twenty-six to thirty thousand tons.

The process of securing this winter harvest appears curious to the uninitiated. The field of ice which has been marked for operations is first carefully scraped by a snow-sweeper to free it from the encrusting snow; a marker is then used to divide it into

square blocks of the desired size. This marker is furnished with a row of teeth, which cut a groove in the ice about three inches deep. It is also provided with a swing guide which regulates the distance between the grooves; when this is done the guide is swung over the back of the marker, so that it falls into the groove just cut; this operation is repeated until the whole field is mapped out, ready for the ice-plough.

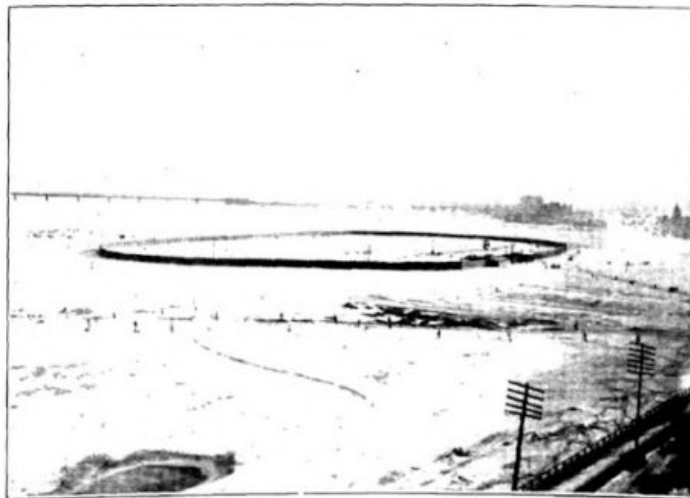
The ice-plough cuts by means of a series of teeth, each varying slightly in length, and cutting a quarter of an inch, so that a plough of eight teeth will cut a groove of two inches deep each time it passes along the line. Ice-bars of various descriptions, with blunt blades, are used to insert into the grooves already made by the ice-plough, in order to break the ice off into blocks. Great saws are employed to open the channel through which the ice-cakes are to pass down with the currents.

The short, dark winter days, sweeping blizzards and driving snowstorms, pass at last. As the season advances, the days lengthen and brighten. The mass of ice on the St. Lawrence becomes gradually honey-combed by the united influence of rain and sun; great "cahocs" appear in the river roads, the air-holes widen into dimpling lakes. For days before the "shove" takes place, from early morning until late at night, crowds line the revêtement wall. The windows of the great warehouses bordering the shore are constantly tenanted by anxious watchers for the first indications of a change in the level fields of ice; it is only when navigation commences that commerce revives from its wintry stagnation.

An "ice-shove" is a grand sight, which once seen is not easily forgotten. Many wiseacres please themselves by predicting exactly how the ice will dispose of itself, and the precise moment at which the change may be expected to take place. But in this case, as in many others, it is usually the unexpected that happens. The most insignificant cause may turn the course of events. The ice descending from the upper portion of the St. Lawrence may remain for days jammed in Lake St. Louis, and then, driven by a favourable wind, float quietly away, or it may

sweep down with a rush, carrying all before it. When the "shove" really takes place, a report is heard like the deep growling of distant thunder, gradually increasing in volume until it swells into an intensity of sound resembling the booming of cannon, repeated and prolonged by thousands of echoes. As the upper ice comes crashing down, the solid mass creaks and shivers; with mighty throes it parts asunder. Gigantic crystalline blocks are thrown high in the air by the force of the seething currents beneath.

When the ice settles into place again after this upheaval, an entire change appears in the landscape. One looks around in amazement; the river has acquired new features, even the appearance of St. Helen's Island has been changed by the great drifts cast upon it. The Ronde is entirely obliterated from view. Down the centre of the river stretches a miniature range of snowy mountains, all glittering white, which the spring sunshine gilds with an affluence of colour and splendour. When the light quivers over these fantastic shapes, the brilliant colours of the ice, the pearly purity of the snow, and the greens and blues of the water beneath, are so tenderly evanescent as to defy any artist to commit them to canvas. Soon another change comes. The ice moves again, the fairy scene has crumbled to nothing; the St. Lawrence is free from its ice-fetters.



THE ST. LAWRENCE IN WINTER: SCENE AT MONTREAL.

<< The Ice-bound St. Lawrence >>, *The Sketch*, vol. 15, no 188, 2 septembre 1896, p. 259.

Une dizaine d'années plus tard, la photographie de 1884 de Notman est publiée dans le numéro de septembre 1896 d'un magazine illustré britannique populaire, *The Sketch*, où elle accompagne l'article « The Ice-Bound St. Lawrence », une description pittoresque du port hivernal empreinte à la fois d'émerveillement et de nostalgie :

Au milieu du fleuve s'étend une miniature chaîne de montagnes couvertes de neige d'un blanc étincelant, que le soleil printanier pare d'une abondance de couleurs et de reflets. Lorsque la lumière frémit sur ces formes fantastiques, les couleurs éclatantes des glaces, la pureté nacrée de la neige et les verts et les bleus de l'eau sont si tendrement effervescent qu'ils défient les artistes de les coucher sur la toile.<sup>1</sup>

[ 20 ]



ICE "SHOVE," MONTREAL, BEFORE CONSTRUCTION OF GUARD PIER.

La photographie de Notman illustrant la débâcle, dans Thomas C. Keefer, « Ice Floods and Winter Navigation of the Lower St. Lawrence », *From the Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Second Series – 1898-99*, vol. 4, s. 3, Ottawa, J. Hope & Sons, Toronto, The Copp-Clark Co, 1898, p. 20.

En plus de sa publication dans *The Sketch*, où elle illustre un article qui dépeint l'aspect et la beauté saisissante de la débâcle, la photographie de Notman paraît également dans un rapport gouvernemental (rédigé par

1. « The Ice-Bound St. Lawrence », *The Sketch*, 2 septembre 1896.

Thomas C. Keefer) visant à décrire et à documenter la catastrophe, ainsi que sur des cartes postales (telle que celle reproduite ci-dessous) provenant de différents fabricants au cours de la décennie qui allait suivre.



*Montreal, Ice Shove [Montréal, la débâcle], carte postale, Montreal Import Co. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montréal.*

Une carte postale similaire, comportant une photographie de la rupture des glaces prise par Notman en 1875, atteste non seulement d'un intérêt durable pour le phénomène de la débâcle, elle constitue aussi un parfait exemple de la résilience de Montréal en tant que communauté, comme le dénote la légende : *Hearty Greetings from Montreal [Salutations cordiales de Montréal]*.





*Hearty Greetings from Montreal, ice shove in Harbor [Salutations cordiales de Montréal, débâcle dans le port], 1875, carte postale. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montréal.*

Les photographies comme celles de Notman proposent des points de vue fabuleux sur des événements ou des scènes populaires tout en offrant aux gens le moyen d'imaginer l'échec ou le succès d'une ville canadienne dans sa capacité à composer avec les forces de la nature.

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# Icône, le sens du sacré (2009)

*par* Louise Vigneault



*Eruoma Awashish, Icône, le sens du sacré, 2009. Installation, technique mixte (crâne, fils, peinture, encadrement), dimension variable. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.*



*Icône, le sens du sacré* est une installation dans laquelle l'artiste Eruoma Awashish a rassemblé une représentation du Christ qui revêt des traits autochtones, porte un pagne et une plume sur la tête. Ses yeux sont ouverts et nous fixent. Des rubans rouges relient sa poitrine à un espace supérieur. Des crânes de bisons sont disposés de chaque côté tandis qu'un troisième est posé au sol. Ils sont également reliés par des rubans rouges et auréolés d'un disque doré, tout comme le Christ.

L'installation est un dispositif dans lequel l'artiste réunit des éléments dans un espace immersif, qui englobe le public dans le but lui faire vivre une expérience non seulement visuelle et contemplative, mais aussi multisensorielle et émotionnelle, qui vise à bousculer ses idées reçues, transformer ses perceptions, ouvrir sa conscience et susciter des réflexions. Dans cet espace, Eruoma Awashish s'approprie des références chrétiennes en les amalgamant aux croyances autochtones pour leur insuffler un nouveau sens et produire un 3e espace, celui d'un dialogue entre les réalités autochtones, qui sont issues du territoire, et allochtones, qui sont issues d'une expérience de déplacement, comme c'est le cas chez les Euroaméricains.

## L'héritage culturel atikamekw

Eruoma Awashish est une artiste issue de la réserve d'Obedjiwan (située en Haute-Mauricie, dans la région du Centre-du-Québec) et d'un métissage entre un père atikamekw et une mère québécoise francophone. Née en 1980, elle n'a pas fréquenté les pensionnats et n'a donc pas subi les traumatismes découlant de l'éloignement de sa famille et de l'abandon forcé de sa langue et de sa culture. Si elle demeure consciente des conséquences des pressions l'assimilation sur sa culture et son territoire, elle réussit à vivre une relative harmonie dans les deux cultures, en menant des études dans le contexte urbain de la majorité, et en se taillant une place dans le milieu de l'art. Dans sa pratique interdisciplinaire, elle fait appel à la peinture, à la sculpture d'assemblage, à la performance et à l'installation, en les objets du quotidien ainsi que des matériaux organiques : bois, panaches, ossements, plumes et végétaux. En réunissant des éléments issus d'univers souvent opposés, elle suscite des dialogues et des réflexions sur le métissage, crée des ponts entre le passé et le présent<sup>1</sup>.

1. Clara Ruestchmann, « La voix du territoire. Représentations territoriales plurielles dans l'œuvre d'Eruoma Awashish » (Mémoire de M.A., Université de Montréal, 2019), 12-13, <https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/handle/1866/22517>.



Eruoma Awashish, *Icône, le sens du sacré* (détail), 2009. Installation, technique mixte (crâne, fils, peinture, encadrement), dimension variable. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.

Les Atikamekws des trois réserves de la Haute-Mauricie – Obedjiwan, Wemotaci, Manawan – ont conservé un lien très étroit avec leur territoire ancestral et parlent toujours leur langue d'origine (l'atikamekw fait partie de la famille des langues algonquiennes). De tradition nomade, ils ont aussi préservé leurs pratiques de chasse. Cette activité longtemps essentielle à leur survie est réalisée dans un esprit d'échange et de négociation avec les animaux, qui sont perçus comme des égaux, des êtres pourvus d'une âme. Afin de sauvegarder l'harmonie avec leur environnement, de maintenir l'équilibre de l'écosystème, ils prennent soin de remercier les animaux pour le sacrifice de leur vie et d'honorer ce lien de réciprocité et d'interdépendance, à travers certains rituels. Dans ce contexte, les ossements et restes d'animaux jouent un rôle d'intermédiaire et de témoin concret de cette communication. Ils symbolisent aussi le lien entretenu avec les espaces parallèles<sup>2</sup>. Chez les artistes autochtones, ces matériaux organiques sont utilisés très souvent pour évoquer un processus de réparation, de guérison, ou encore un dialogue entre les dimensions matérielle et spirituelle, entre l'univers du vivant et celui des morts. Dans l'œuvre *Icône, le sens du sacré*, les trois crânes de bisons auréolés de dorure incarnent ainsi une nouvelle trinité, la quête d'équilibre nécessaire au maintien de la vie, à la survie des âmes et des corps, et à la recherche d'une harmonie dans la cohabitation des êtres entre eux comme avec leur environnement<sup>3</sup>. Les rubans rouges qui relient les crânes renvoient d'ailleurs à cette communication, qui s'opère non plus par la parole mais par différents sens<sup>4</sup>.

## L'héritage culturel chrétien

Pour Eruoma Awashish, les références religieuses catholiques font partie de son bagage familial, non seulement du côté québécois, mais aussi atikamekw. L'histoire des Atikamekw révèle qu'ils ont entretenu un rapport ambivalent avec l'Église, en se soumettant, durant les périodes difficiles, aux pressions des missionnaires, afin d'obtenir leur assistance ou des avantages matériels<sup>5</sup>. Des tensions survenaient toutefois lorsque ces derniers dénonçaient certaines croyances et rituels traditionnels et imposaient des censures. Jeune, Eruoma Awashish ne comprenait pas pourquoi son peuple continuait d'adhérer à une religion qui lui avait causé tant de tort. Elle a ensuite réalisé que le catholicisme avait contribué malgré tout à perpétuer les pratiques spirituelles atikamekw, par le biais d'un syncrétisme, d'un exercice d'accommodement entre les croyances, par un syncrétisme (une combinaison de deux cultures ou de deux systèmes de croyances en apparence opposés, mais ayant des éléments en commun, certains fondements similaires. Dans les campagnes de conversion, il a participé aux stratégies d'assimilation des missionnaires, mais il a aussi permis aux Autochtones de maintenir leur croyance à travers celle qui était imposée). Ce syncrétisme est présent dans *Icône, le sens du sacré*.

2. Gabrielle Marcoux, « Ossements et animaux dans l'art autochtone actuel », *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* XLV, 2-3 (2015) : 25-32, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/raq/2015-v45-n2-3-raq02806/1038039ar/> 27)

3. Gabrielle Marcoux, « Ossements et animaux dans l'art autochtone actuel », 26-29.

4. Clara Ruestchmann, « La voix du territoire. Représentations territoriales plurielles dans l'œuvre d'Eruoma Awashish », 58.

5. Clara Ruestchmann, « La voix du territoire. Représentations territoriales plurielles dans l'œuvre d'Eruoma Awashish », 36-37.

Les rubans qui relient le Christ autochtone au ciel font référence, pour leur part, aux cérémonies de la danse du soleil – *Sun Dance* – pratiquée par les Autochtones des Plaines, un rituel de passage qui visait à éprouver l'endurance et la bravoure des guerriers. Suspendus par la poitrine, ils devaient supporter la douleur pendant plusieurs jours avec stoïcisme. Ainsi, de la même manière que l'épreuve des guerriers les poussait à dépasser leurs limites et à transcender leur condition, la crucifixion de Jésus et l'exposition de ses blessures, de ses stigmates, ont témoigné de son sacrifice, mais aussi de la transcendance de sa condition comme de celle de l'humanité, par le rachat de ses fautes et le dépassement de ses faiblesses.

Ainsi, le détournement des références chrétiennes au profit de l'intégration de la réalité autochtone a permis à l'artiste de rompre le lien de domination de l'Église sur son peuple, mais aussi de surmonter les oppositions et d'instaurer un dialogue entre les deux cultures<sup>6</sup>. Les croisements interculturels viennent souligner pour leur part les éléments communs aux croyances atikamekw et franco-catholique, et révéler par le fait même la dimension universelle de l'expérience d'interdépendance des cultures et les défis que partage l'humanité.



Eruoma Awashish, *Icône, le sens du sacré* (détail), 2009. Installation, technique mixte (crâne, fils, peinture, encadrement), dimension variable. Avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste.

### À propos de l'auteur

Louise Vigneault est professeure au département d'histoire de l'art et d'études cinématographiques de l'Université de Montréal. Spécialiste de l'art nord-américain, elle s'intéresse aux imaginaires collectifs, aux constructions culturelles ainsi qu'aux stratégies de représentation identitaire. En 2002, elle publie *Identité et modernité dans l'art au Québec* : Borduas, Sullivan, Riopelle, et en 2011, *Espace artistique et modèle pionnier* : Tom Thomson et Jean-Paul Riopelle, aux éditions Hurtubise HMH. Elle s'intéresse également aux créations contemporaines autochtones. En 2016, elle publie une monographie consacrée à l'artiste et chef wendat Zacharie Vincent. Une autohistoire artistique aux éditions Hannenorak. Elle est membre du Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises (CRILCQ) et du Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIERA).

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# In the Conservatory (1883)

by Samantha Burton



Frances M. Jones Bannerman, *In the Conservatory*, 1883. Oil on canvas. Nova Scotia Public Archives, Nova Scotia. Public domain.

**COMING SOON**

# Inuvik Parka (1960-80)

*by* Jennifer Burgess

**COMING SOON**



# Nova Scotia Wool Mural (1953)

by Hilary Doda



Bessie Bailey Murray (design), Wool mural, 1953. Wool appliqué on cotton ground, 456 x 200 cm. Cape Sable Historical Society, Nova Scotia.

Mythmaking is the core of popular history, and Canada's colonial past lends itself well to stories of bucolic rural life. A woolen **appliqué mural** made in the mid-20th century in Nova Scotia sets a stereotypical scene, depicting three seasons of Nova Scotian life during the colonial period. On the left, an Acadian girl stands beneath an apple tree in springtime, surrounded by lambs. In the centre, United Empire Loyalists picnic in a quiet summer field, their village framed against the mountains. On the right, for autumn, a lone Scotsman tends a flock of sheep in the Cape Breton hills.

19th- and 20th-century depictions of Nova Scotia's founding cultures tend to focus on particular communities: the Acadians, the English, the Scots, and occasionally the Germans. However, this view omits the Mi'kmaq resident in the region for more than 11,000 years, and the Black Empire Loyalists who arrived between 1782–1785 following the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The mural depicts, and encourages remembrance of, Nova Scotia's past as an all-white, European history. Leaving people of colour out of the image of the founding nations perpetuates the racism embedded in the way we tell the Canadian story. The viewer is invited to identify with one of the depicted demographics, and anyone from a non-white background becomes a racialized outsider—by being non-white, they are explicitly excluded from the idea of being “Nova Scotian.”

This composite fabric image tells a historical tale on the surface, a fiction of peaceful immigration and colonization that stands in contrast to the region's actual history of deportation, war, and genocide. But spun into its hand-woven threads are multiple stories about Nova Scotia, its people, and perceptions of history. And entirely unintentionally, this large textile mural, a work of art originally designed to encourage interest in the many uses of homespun wool, helped change the public face of Nova Scotia.

1. See Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). See pages 9-11 in particular.

## The appliqué mural

In 1953, at the invitation of the Nova Scotia Sheep Breeders' Association, Mary Black, then-chair of the Handcrafts Division of the Department of Trade and Industry of Nova Scotia, organized a display in Truro, Nova Scotia, of articles made of homespun wool. Black was also asked to arrange for a piece of textile art to become the backdrop for a display, a piece that would teach the history of sheep raising in Nova Scotia and showcase homespun wool. She commissioned Bessie Bailey Murray to design an appliqué mural made from Nova Scotian wool. The intent was twofold: to represent the history and character of Nova Scotia, and to encourage local women to work with homegrown wool rather than store-bought textiles.

Originally commissioned as a "small panel," the mural evolved during the design process. Pieced together from over fifty different pieces of fabric in a variety of colours and weave patterns, including work from local weavers Joyce Chown and Vera Cummings, it grew to a finished size of eight feet high and fourteen feet long. The range of styles and colours represented the potential of wool as a versatile medium in a decade where artificial fibres like nylon were gaining ground and sheep farming was in major decline. The textured wools and the antiquated costumes on the figures drew the viewer back in time to a "simpler" lifestyle espoused by **antimodernists**, one which celebrated a very specific narrative of Nova Scotia's past.

The tartan-clad shepherd in the upper right-hand corner refines that narrative myth even further. He is also the primary reason the mural has been preserved as historically important, as the mural contains the first example of the now-ubiquitous Nova Scotia tartan. A mainstay of Nova Scotia tourism advertising, the tartan cemented the later twentieth-century branding of the province as a primarily Scottish region. The "wee Scotsman" was intended to represent all Scottish settlers in the province, but during the design process Murray became concerned about how he should be dressed. Many Scottish families who had migrated to Nova Scotia remained attached to clan identities and old rivalries, so rather than be seen to favour one clan over another, Murray and tartan expert Isabel MacAulay designed a new, original plaid for the kilt in the mural. Based on the colours of Terence Bay, the blue, green, white, and gold tartan's popularity exploded following the exhibition. Two years later it was formally designated the official tartan of Nova Scotia, thousands of yards of it were ordered, and the mural itself became a part of Nova Scotia's public memory and myth-making.<sup>2</sup>

2. Marjorie Major, "History of the Nova Scotia Tartan," *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1972): 191-214.

## The fictions of place and memory

The vision of Nova Scotia encouraged by the mural's design fits the narrative of Nova Scotia popular in the mid-twentieth century. It was created in the wake of what historian Ian Mackay has termed the "tartanism" of the province: a commercialized obsession with placing Scottish culture at the root of Nova Scotia's settler heritage, at the expense of the diversity of the rest of the population's lived experiences and identities. Governmental efforts—including the hiring of a bagpiper clad in Nova Scotia tartan to play at the provincial border—ensured, however, that the tartan, and Scottish culture in general, would become major parts of Nova Scotia's national and international image.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks in large part to those marketing efforts, tartan itself has since become known as the traditional weaving style of Nova Scotia.<sup>4</sup> The style replaced other techniques from both Indigenous and settler groups which were more commonly used in the region prior to the 1950s. With Scottish culture elevated above all others, and the story of Cape Breton redesigned as a time-locked Gaelic island, tourist interest in the region boomed. The wee Scotsman and his sheep became a mascot for an imagined homeland, a declaration of Nova Scotian identity based on a constructed concept of a common past. The Scottish story eclipsed all others, flattening any diversity into a single narrative.

The stated intent of the Nova Scotia Sheep Breeders' Association was to increase awareness of a local commodity that was losing ground in the midcentury marketplace. Antimodernist sentiment in the midcentury made the handicraft marketplace appealing, and, as crafts like hooked rugs from Chéticamp were popular with tourists, the provincial government encouraged and financially supported the production of other types of folk-art souvenirs through the Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry.<sup>5</sup> The sale of woven items like potholders and placemats was seen as a potential income stream for the wives and daughters of fishermen, who were encouraged to take courses from the Handcrafts Division. The mural itself was commercial, made through craft skills including spinning, dyeing, and weaving, yet the result was an iconic piece of art. Attempts to revitalize weaving in the twentieth century primarily focused on its artistic potential, often with a folksy aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> The mural's imagery fits that nostalgic aesthetic, harkening back to a romanticized ideal of settler history.

The mural expresses some widely-held but fictitious ideas about Canada's history, and about Nova Scotia's cultural past. The designers' use of a wide range of textile weaves, colours, and textures brings the image to almost three-dimensional life. The stories embedded in the mural's depictions of early Canadian settlers were designed to be open-ended and interpretable, though our understanding of the images today should focus on what is missing, rather than what is visible.



*Bessie Bailey Murray (design), Wool mural (detail of the "wee Scotsman"), 1953. Wool appliqué on cotton ground, 456 x 200 cm. Cape Sable Historical Society, Nova Scotia.*

3. Ian McKay, "Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954," *Acadiensis* 21, no. 2 (1992): 5-47.

4. Monica Germaná, "Historical Places of Interest, Books, Tourism and Advertising: Scottish Icons in Contemporary Halifax (Nova Scotia)," *International Review of Scottish Studies* 28 (2003): 25, 35, 37.

5. *Nova Scotia Handcrafts* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Department of Education, 1971), 36.

6. See Mary E. Black, *New Key to Weaving: A Textbook of Hand Weaving for the Beginning Weaver* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1957), and Eveline MacLeod and Daniel MacInnes, *Celtic Threads: A Journey in Cape Breton Crafts* (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2014).

A modern fantasy of a pre-modern world, the mural was a springboard for the popular image of Nova Scotia as a Scottish province. The Nova Scotia tartan, invented for the mural, is as much a part of that fiction as is the mural's portrayal of white settlers as the sole origin of local culture. The mural is an excellent demonstration of the fluid boundaries between art and craft, of the importance of art in creating our perceptions of ourselves, and of the many ways Indigenous and Black inhabitants have been written out of the Canadian national story.

### About the author

Hilary Doda is an Assistant Professor in Costume Studies at the Fountain School of Performing Arts at Dalhousie University, teaching global dress history. Her research program focuses on the material culture of dress and textiles in the early modern Atlantic world. She holds an Interdisciplinary PhD from Dalhousie University, with a project that examined the development of new clothing vernaculars and the shaping of colonial identity in pre-deportation Acadia. Recent publications include an article in *Acadiensis* on Acadian needlework tools, an essay on spurs and early modern masculinity for an edited collection, and a book chapter on Mary II's investiture wardrobe as Queen of England. Current projects include a study of traditional weaving in Cape Breton, and a continuation of her work on spurs and masculinities.

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# O'Halloran's Outfit (c. 1841)

*by* Emma Hassencahl-Perley

**COMING SOON**

# Out of the Silence (1997)

*by* Alison Ariss

**COMING SOON**



# Pariah (2008)

by Loren Lerner



*Marion Wagschal, Pariah, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 39 x 36 cm. Private collection.*

The Montreal artist Marion Wagschal (1943–) was one of the first teachers of painting and drawing at Concordia University, where she taught for thirty-seven years. As a feminist artist, interested in empowering women artists and valorizing the ways women experience their lives, she introduced a studio arts course on women and painting. Throughout her career, Wagschal has consistently explored the human figure. “The body,” she believes, “is a kind of battlefield where struggles for survival – political, physical, environmental, psychological – are waged. The body is a map of a life lived.”<sup>1</sup> Intimate moments absorb her; portraits not of the monumental but of the everyday. She never idealizes or romanticizes the body; rather, her figures are suggestive of the liabilities and promises of being human.

In her late sixties, Wagschal began to focus on her own experience of aging. *Pariah* is a self-portrait wherein she stands alone in a dark space, estranged from the other partygoers. A pitiful figure, oversized and formless, Wagschal compares badly to the beautiful woman in the distance surrounded by fox-like gossipers. The woman, possibly the artist’s memory of her younger self, stares knowingly in her direction, as if to say, “Look what you have become in your old age, a social outcast.” Wagschal peers unrelentingly from behind her beak mask, her bug-like eyes widened in response to the woman’s hawkish stare. She is a buffoonish misfit who has donned a pathetic, oversized clown costume as armour.

1. Frankie Mathieson, “The Feminist Painter’s Bold Oeuvre Comes to Life in a New Exhibition Celebrating Canada’s Leading Female Artists,” *AnOther*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8281/a-closer-look-at-the-confessional-works-of-marion-wagschal>. Wagschal explained in a telephone conversation with Lerner on December 13, 2021, that the idea of the female body as a battlefield connects with feminist artist Barbara Kruger’s *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, a 1989 word and image photographic silkscreen print on vinyl, 284.48 x 284.48 cm.





Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, *Punchinello's Children Begging for Sweets*, No. 17 from the series *Divertimento per li ragazzi*, c. 1800. Pen and brown ink, brush, and brown washes over black chalk, 35.2 x 47.0 cm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Wikimedia Commons. Tiepolo transformed Punchinello into a sympathetic person. In a world of Punchinellos, he grows up, marries, has children, dies, and is buried. Over the course of his lifetime, he observes labourers at work, cooks polenta, visits the circus, and is unjustly imprisoned and nearly executed. Tiepolo's paintings and drawings of Punchinello do not follow the pattern of a linear narrative, but offer instead a wide range of stories.

*Pariah* (2008) emerges from Wagschal's mingling of thoughts and sensations. This stream of consciousness is the association of visual and auditory impressions that flow from a person's mind. Wagschal describes this process: "There are a lot of elements in my art, my own life, my own interpretation, my own circuitry, my own volition. . . . If you are an artist, you are constantly weaving all that together like a big swirl."<sup>2</sup> *Pariah's* mask references paintings and drawings of Tiepolo's Punchinello, a low-life character who originated in the largely improvisational Commedia dell'Arte street theatre of early seventeenth-century Italy. Wagschal was drawn to Punchinello, whose mask sets him apart as an outsider unwilling to conform to accepted modes of behaviour or thought. *Pariah* also purposefully echoes Watteau's paintings of *Pierrot*, a clown dressed in a lumpish costume whose piercing gaze confronts the viewer with a look of sadness and defiance.

Wagschal works intuitively to distill diverse types of memories: visual impressions of paintings, drawings, photographs, and cartoons; mental images of events previously experienced; and verbal recollections of stories about her family she heard as a child. *Pariah* took the artist months to complete. She reworked the painting again and again until she found an image with enough emanations to complete the work.<sup>3</sup> Her canvas reveals the process of art making, like the daubs of pink and grey color in the *Pariah's* white costume and the thinly drawn black lines that outline the shapes of figures and spaces.

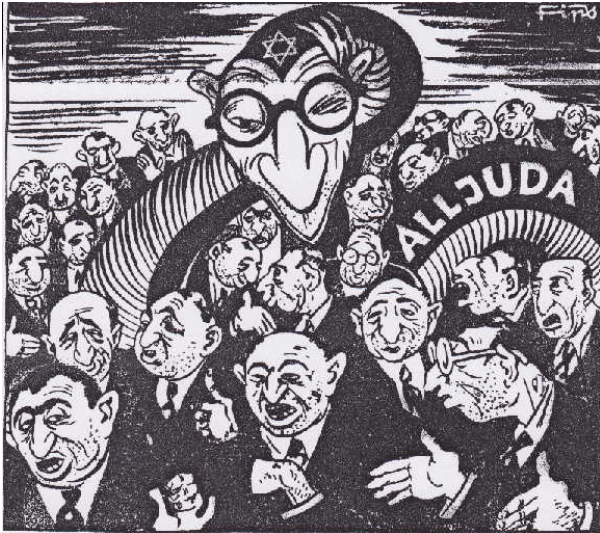


Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot*, c. 1718-19. Oil on canvas, 184.5 x 149.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Wikimedia Commons. *Pierrot* was a French addition to the comedic types of the Italian commedia dell'arte. Although the clown does not resemble Watteau's features, *Pierrot* may be a self-portrait of Watteau's temperament. The artist was described by his contemporaries as moody, self-deprecating, and uncomfortable in society.

2. Jake Moore and Loren Lerner, Interview with Marion Wagschal at her Private Views exhibition, FOFA Gallery, Concordia University, February 1, 2010.

3. Moore and Lerner, Interview with Wagschal, 2010.





*Brood of Serpents, "The Jew's symbol is a worm, not without reason. He seeks to creep up on what he wants," Der Stürmer 40, September 1934. German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI.*

*This is a cover cartoon from Julius Streicher's Der Stürmer, a magazine published from 1923 to 1945. Streicher was one of the earliest followers of Adolf Hitler. Cartoons from Der Stürmer magazine were posted in display cases all over Germany.*

In the privacy of her home, Wagschal's mask also assumes some of the adverse characteristics of *Pariah*. In *Big Mouth* (2008), Wagschal sits naked on the edge of her bed, the sheets crumpled behind her as if she has recently awakened from a sleepless night. From her mouth she spews small black rocks, symbolic of irritating thoughts and feelings that erupt from her mouth. The angle of her pose discloses signs of age—flabby flesh, broad hips and protruding stomach. *Big Mouth*, like *Pariah*, implies that old age is an absence, the result of social invisibility and personal emptiness. Previously youthful and fully visible, the older woman is disregarded by a youth-obsessed society, leading her to become psychologically depressed and alone. In *Big Mouth*, Wagschal depicts herself sitting like a man, legs apart and hand pressed down on her thigh. Sporting large, boot-like slippers and closely cropped hair, she evokes an ambiguous sexuality that is more masculine than feminine. This is her attempt to construct a defence through male toughness and anger.

Significantly, *Pariah* is not only connected to Tiepolo and Watteau but also to the concept of the pariah as a Jewish outcast, excluded from humankind. Malicious anti-Semitic cartoons of Jews with long beak-like long noses resembling that in Wagschal's *Pariah* appeared in graphic illustrations such as the *Brood of Serpents* in the German newspaper *Der Stürmer*. These cartoons played a key role in demonizing the Jew and spreading Nazi propaganda. The Nazis in Germany promoted racial superiority and anti-Semitism to justify the extermination of six million European Jews during World War II. With *Pariah*, Wagschal expresses a keen awareness of her Jewish identity as the daughter of parents who fled to Trinidad to escape the **Holocaust**. Wagschal was born there and stayed until she was nine years old; then she and her family immigrated to Montreal. She notes that her mother often spoke about relatives and life in Germany: "They had wonderful lives, they were happy a lot of the time and then everything was completely gone."<sup>4</sup> Wagschal's work has multiple associations, including the burden of her mother's memories of family murdered in the Holocaust.



*Marion Wagschal, Big Mouth, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 39 x 36 cm. Private collection.*

4. Moore and Lerner, Interview with Wagschal, 2010.

## Wagschal's *Dog Bath*



Marion Wagschal, *Dog Bath*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 cm. Private collection.

In *Pariah* and *Big Mouth* the mask has decidedly negative associations. All this changes in *Dog Bath* (2008), with a masking that embodies a positive self-image. In the privacy of her bath, Wagschal is no longer an aging body. Rather, she is an older woman and an artist who inhabits an ever-creating body. *Dog Bath* is both tender and satirical, contrasting Wagschal's fond memories of the dogs with which she grew up to the insult of calling undesirable women "old dogs." As she leans out of the tub to gently stroke her pet, the dog's eyes express sympathy and everlasting love. In this private exchange between dog and woman—as Wagschal allows her body to respond to the sensations of belonging to the natural order of life—she connects with her animal spirit. In this affirmation, the mask no longer resembles the beak of a bird of prey, but the long furry nose of a friendly pet.



## A woman artist's experience of aging

Wagschal's *Pariah*, along with *Big Mouth* and *Dog Bath*, show the complexities inherent in creating images related to the aging woman. These include the ways the artist represents her own physical aging, the choices she makes to disguise her identity, and how aging can comprise many identities. A number of themes arise from discussing Wagschal's works: how women experience old age; the effects of gender and aging on cultural norms and collective identity; and the impact of aging on self-respect and dignity in later life. These themes not only declare the meaning of the passage of time and the value of life, but on a larger scale show how the story of aging is woven together with the story of being an older woman artist.

### About the author

Loren Lerner, Professor Emerita, Art History, Concordia University, is interested in women artists, images of children and youth, the interrelations of textual and visual culture, and artistic responses to the Holocaust. Lerner's recent publications include "François-Marc Gagnon et ses publications" in *François-Marc Gagnon et l'art au Québec: Hommage et parcours* (2021); "The Ethical Development of Boys in Rousseau's *Emile* and Jean-Baptiste Greuze's Artworks" in *Lumen* 32 (2021); "The Infant, the Mother, and the Breast in the Paintings of Marguerite Gérard" in *Romanticism and the Cultures of Infancy* (2020); "Youth and Sunlight: Reflections of Childhood" in *Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons, 1880-1930* (2019); "The Manipulation of Indigenous Imagery to Represent Canadian Childhood and Nationhood in 19th Century Canada" in *Nineteenth Century Childhoods in Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives* (2018); and "William Notman's Home Library: Discovering Underlying Meaning in the Portrait Photograph" in *À la recherche du savoir : nouveaux échanges sur les collections du Musée McCord / Collecting Knowledge: New Dialogues on McCord Museum Collections* (2016).

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# The Provincial Lunatic Asylum (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health), Toronto (1850)

by Tara Bissett



*John Howard, lithograph developed from Howard's original concept drawing (published by Scrobie & Balfour), 1850. Photographic postcard. The image was reproduced in numerous magazines and journals to show the building in an idealized manner. Note that the image falsely depicts the building as closer to the lake than in reality. Reproduced with the permission of CAMH Archives, Toronto, ON.*

The architectural design of mental health institutions has been dramatically affected by changing perceptions of mental illness through time. Until the mid-19th century, mental illness was hidden away in Canadian society, and it was left to family members, prisons, and so-called “madhouses” to shoulder the responsibility of caring for the mentally ill. Around 1850, mental healthcare practices throughout North America were called into question and reforms were enacted. Reformers called for humane and hygienic treatment protocols, centralized in one institution, and this movement led to the construction of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in the City of Toronto. Today, the asylum has been renamed the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and has expanded its services throughout the city. In a location that was once the southwestern edge of the growing city, the neighbourhood is now within the west end of downtown Toronto, where the institution serves as a landmark along one of Toronto’s main arteries, Queen Street West. The CAMH has borne witness to the changing conception of mental illness since the 19th century.

## Social reform

Known as “one of the wonders of the west,” the institution once held the third-largest patient population in North America and was the only permanent facility for psychiatric treatment in Upper Canada.<sup>1</sup> The asylum’s site comprised a monumental 20-hectare plot set in a greenery landscape. Construction began in 1846, according to the design of notable Canadian architect John Howard. As a stately **Neoclassical** building with a centralized dome, the design displayed the architect’s knowledge of the British National Gallery in London’s Trafalgar Square, which had been built less than a decade earlier. Like the gallery, the asylum was a public institution that drew upon the established visual authority of historical architecture. A palatial five-storey stone structure, the building’s entrance faced north, and carried an imposing classical **portico** atop massive columns, reminiscent of the **Parthenon** from ancient Greece.



Valentine & Sons, Photographic postcard, 1910. The image shows the north-facing central facade of the asylum (now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) situated in a treed landscape. The postcard is labeled “Asylum for the Insane. Queen Street West, Toronto, Ont. Canada.” Toronto Public Library Archives.

Embodying social reform, the building was designed to be admired, and the asylum became a sensation shortly after its construction. Howard’s design was in line with other state-sanctioned psychiatric facilities that assumed a monumental character, capturing the collective imagination and becoming unlikely symbols of civic pride and wonder. The Provincial Asylum was associated with high cure rates, hope, and modernity, and

1. “Provincial Lunatic Asylum Toronto,” *Canadian Illustrated News*, May 21, 1870, 458.

became a popular Toronto tourist destination. Until the mid-20th century, lithographs and watercolours of the institution appeared in popular magazines and on postcards.

## Program of order and control

Just two decades after it was built, the institution was overcrowded, and plans to enlarge it were underway. Architect Kivas Tully transformed the complex into a U-shape by adding two four-storey wings flanking Howard's original building.

Tully added architectural details that introduced a domestic atmosphere to the institution. He broke up the facades of the new wings to resemble rows of townhouses and inserted bay windows, which were common in late 19th-century houses. These domestic additions reflected the ethos of the interior, which cultivated the atmosphere of a Victorian home. The asylum's corridors were long, well-lit, and unusually broad, acting as indoor pathways and inviting safe social interactions: the long sightlines would avoid startling patients with surprise encounters. The new building wings separated patients by gender, each with its own dining hall and living room area for socialization, with views of the surrounding landscape. With a role adapted to the new domestic structure of the facility, the asylum superintendent took a familial approach to his patients instead of a punitive one.<sup>2</sup>

However, the asylum's plan also reflected the prevailing theories of the influential psychologist Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, who suggested that an architectural program of order and control should be anchored to the treatment protocol. Most residents were confined to rooms reminiscent of cells; patients with more severe illnesses resided deep within the wings, away from the central block and sometimes inside internal locked hospitals.<sup>3</sup> The central block, under the dome, was generally off-limits to the patient population and was occupied by the superintendent, the bureaucratic offices, and the chapel. The upper level of the original building contained expensive luxury apartments with Victorian verandahs. Occupied by wealthy patients, these rooms were separated from the rest of the building by stairways that went directly to the ground level and allowed for a privileged experience.

Control of patient activity was also reflected by the introduction of several outbuildings that appeared around the main institution near the end of the 19th century. These buildings included a slaughterhouse, industrial kitchen, and workshops, and were staffed by patient-labourers. According to contemporary psychology, outdoor activity and the development of skilled labour was an integral part of the curative process, although neither the patient-labourers from the asylum nor the nearby Mercer Reformatory of Women were compensated for their work. The original masonry enclosure that still stands as a designated heritage structure was built by the institution's patients.

## A new face for mental health treatment

After World War Two, the perception of mental illness changed again in Canadian society, with advances in treatments and psychotropic medicines that facilitated outpatient treatments. Asylums were no longer conceived as substitute homes providing rooms for extended stays, but instead as modern machines intended

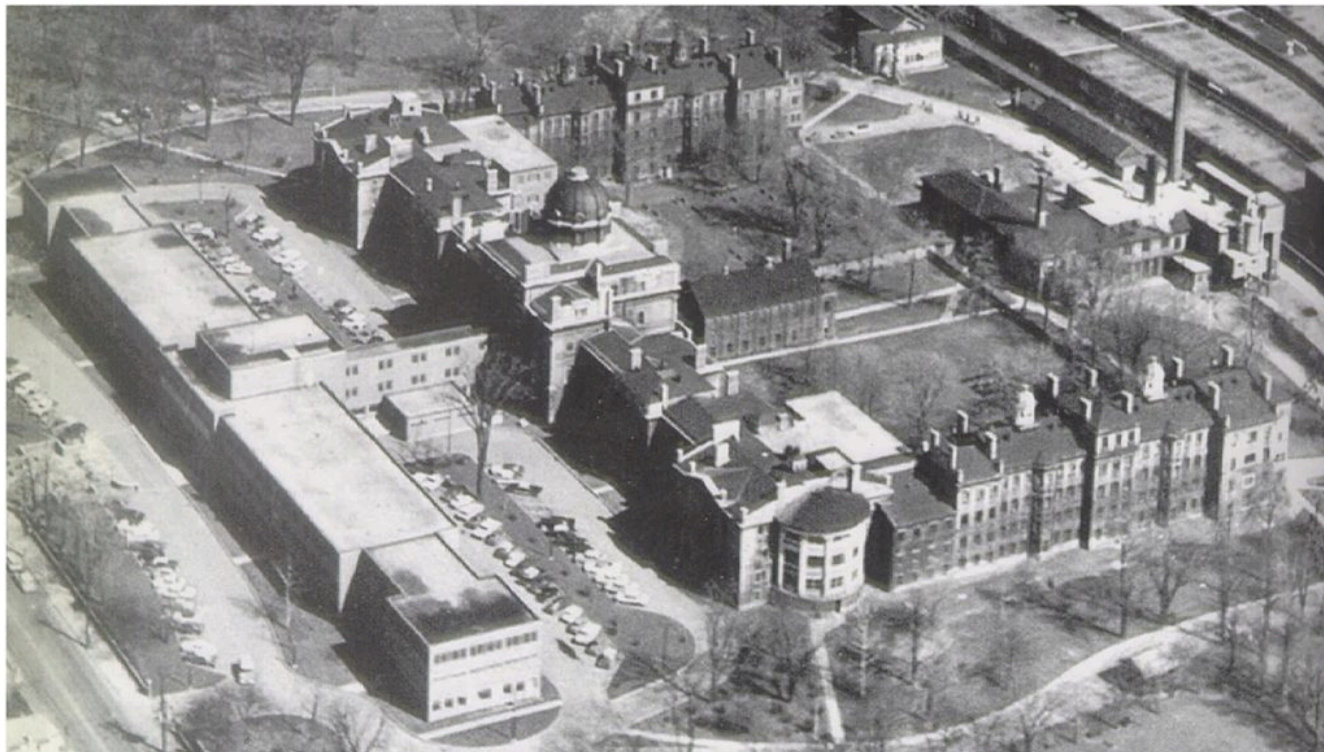
2. "Provincial Lunatic Asylum Toronto," *Canadian Illustrated News*, May 21, 1870, 458.

3. Alec Keefer, "Building Canada West," in *The Provincial Asylum in Toronto: Reflections on Social and Architectural History*, ed. Edna Hudson, 83-106 (Toronto: Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, 2000), 155-66.



for curing mental health conditions. In turn, the building's historical facade and monumental countenance became associated with old-fashioned practices in medicine.

Responding to these cultural changes, the institution projected a new image of mental health treatment in the 1950s. A modern, utilitarian building was built on the shared plot of land directly in front of the original institution to conceal the original Neo-Classical facade from the street. Constructed of glass and concrete, the new structure reflected treatment protocols of the modern era: impersonal, utilitarian, and unimposing.



*Unknown photographer, image showing the Administrative Building, opened in 1956, twenty feet from the original face of the asylum fronting Queen Street and shielding the old building from public view, c. 1960s. Reproduced with permission of CAMH Archives, Toronto, ON.*

Developing a campus-like atmosphere, the institution incorporated a community centre with stores, a parlour, and a coffee shop as its new focus, acting as a microcosm of the surrounding urban fabric. Despite heritage campaigns to conserve Howard and Tully's 19th-century asylum that stood behind this modern building and was so emblematic of the modernity of 1850, it was demolished in 1975.

The evolution of the architectural complex of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health documents the changing perceptions of mental health treatment and the efforts to mitigate the stigma of mental illness. The institution's process of continual reinvention was not isolated to architectural change; it was also renamed several times. Opening originally as the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, twenty years later it became the Hospital for the Insane, and later received new names corresponding to each epoch's conception of mental health treatment. In 1979, the institution's address was symbolically changed from 999 to 1000 Queen Street West.

Today CAMH is an important icon in Toronto's urban landscape. The institution and its landscape was transformed again in the early 2000s to better incorporate it into the surrounding Queen West strip and contribute to the area's revitalisation. If the nineteenth century drew upon historicized, triumphal architecture to glorify modern ideals in the centralizing of mental health treatment, and the post-war period of the 1950s used modern materials of concrete and glass to impart an institutional rationality, CAMH today blends the

complex into the surrounding community, with public spaces and roads that connect the institutional facilities with the city beyond, challenging the stigma of mental illness and addiction through architecture.

### About the author

Tara Bissett, PhD is an architectural and urban historian. She is an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, at Daniels School of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto and Lecturer at the School of Architecture, University of Waterloo. Tara's research focuses on the history of women in architecture and the planning of cities in early twentieth-century Toronto. She is particularly interested in women professionals who were not recognized as architects in their time, but were instead streamed into fields, such as social work, administration, and general urban caretaking. Tara is on the Board of the Architectural Conservancy Ontario Toronto Branch. She is the project lead on the University of Waterloo initiative, *Able*, a project that aims to enrich accessibility and inclusive design in Canadian architectural curricula and post-secondary environments.

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# Sketch of Upper Canada (1795-96)

by Denis Longchamps



Elizabeth Simcoe, *Sketch of Upper Canada*, 1795-1796. Encre sur écorce de bouleau, 19 x 28 cm. Une version plus petite que celle sur papier conservée aux Archives de l'Ontario. Cette version accompagnait un album de 32 esquisses sur écorce de bouleau remis au roi George III par John Graves Simcoe à son retour en Angleterre. British Library Maps K Top 119.15. © British Library Board.

La bibliothèque du roi George III, intégrée à la British Library, possède un album ainsi qu'une carte géographique dessinés sur écorce de bouleau par Elizabeth Simcoe (1762-1850) lors de son voyage au Canada entre 1791 et 1795. Elle y accompagnait son mari, John Graves Simcoe (1752-1806), nommé Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Haut-Canada. Ils offrirent la carte et l'album au roi à leur retour en 1796, un geste de propagande visant surtout à convaincre le roi de nommer Simcoe au poste de Gouverneur général du Canada.

## Une carte géographique

La carte géographique, titrée *Sketch of Upper Canada*, est en réalité la copie d'une carte précédente, *Sketch of Upper Canada showing the Routes Lt. Gov. Simcoe took on journeys between March 1793 and September 1795*, réalisée par Elizabeth Simcoe en 1795 et maintenant conservée aux Archives de l'Ontario. Des notes de référence expliquent que les futurs sites proposés par le Lieutenant-Gouverneur sont en rouge, que celles de

York et Chatham sont en voie de développement et que la rue Dundas est tracée d'Oxford jusqu'à la baie de Quinte et pratiquement terminée entre Oxford et la baie de Burlington. La copie sur écorce de bouleau ne donne pas autant de détails; les trente lignes de notes sont réduites à une courte légende explicative car la documentation visuelle des endroits mentionnés se trouve dans l'album.

Que la carte présentée au roi ait été tracée sur écorce de bouleau, combinant ainsi la cartographie européenne et un élément autochtone, suggère une appropriation coloniale répondant aux besoins britanniques que Simon Schama appelle « l'union nécessaire entre la culture et la nature<sup>1</sup> » (traduction de l'auteur) et peut donc être lu comme étant la volonté d'imposer le pouvoir colonial britannique sur le paysage canadien.

## Un album de propagande

L'album compte trente-deux pages d'environ vingt-sept centimètres par dix-neuf centimètres sur lesquelles sont encollés autant de dessins tracés sur un ovale d'écorce de bouleau mesurant environ dix centimètres de haut sur dix-sept centimètres de large. Les dessins de Mme Simcoe s'inspirent des esquisses à l'aquarelle ou à l'encre souvent produites *in situ* lors des multiples déplacements des Simcoe à travers le Haut et le bas Canada. Ces dessins reflètent l'esthétique du pittoresque tel que défini par le révérend William Gilpin dans une série de livres publiés à partir de 1768. Ces ouvrages ont guidé Elizabeth Simcoe dans son interprétation des paysages canadiens selon l'esthétique du pittoresque anglais. Le trente-deuxième dessin est une copie d'un dessin du château de Chepstow tirée d'un des livres de Gilpin, *Observations of the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales*. L'inclusion du château de Chepstow dans l'album canadien présenterait Elizabeth comme descendante (supposée) de Guillaume le Conquérant, qui fit construire ce château. Un parallèle apparaît alors entre la colonisation normande de l'Angleterre au onzième siècle et celle du Canada par les Britanniques à l'époque géorgienne.

Bien que les Simcoe aient passé plusieurs mois au Bas-Canada et qu'Elizabeth Simcoe ait créé plus de 200 aquarelles et dessins durant cette période, aucun dessin du Bas-Canada n'apparaît dans l'album royal. Cette omission confirme que l'album n'est pas un souvenir de voyage mais bien un témoignage visuel du travail accompli par John Simcoe au Canada. L'album peut être divisé en trois sections : onze endroits qui existaient déjà au moment de son arrivée, onze endroits fondés par Simcoe pendant son mandat et neuf suggérant des endroits propices à un développement futur grâce à la présence de ressources naturelles dont cinq chutes d'eau, une source d'énergie nécessaire pour activer les moulins. Ainsi le contenu de l'album devient clair : il s'agit d'un élément promotionnel pour la carrière politique de John Graves Simcoe. La carte adjointe, de même format que les pages de l'album, supporte cette conclusion.

L'album débute avec une image de Pointe au Bodet (Rivière-Beaudette), première étape sur la route du Haut-Canada. C'est là que Simcoe prête serment et devient officiellement Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Haut-Canada. Suivent des représentations de York (maintenant Toronto) fondée par Simcoe et de Castle Frank, la résidence du couple près de York. L'architecture de Castle Frank a été qualifiée de « frontier style » et d'« avant-garde en unissant le chalet rustique pittoresque au goût classique ancien dans la nature sauvage<sup>2</sup> » (traduction de l'auteur).

1. « the necessary union of culture and nature ». Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 19.

2. « in bringing the Picturesque rustic cottage and archaic classical taste [...] to the wilderness ». James D. Kornwolf, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial North America*, vol.2 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1307.





Elizabeth Simcoe, *Mohawk Village on the Grand River or Ouse*, 1795-1796. Encre sur écorce de bouleau, 10.5 x 17 cm. Une représentation du village mohawk établi par Joseph Brant après avoir reçu une récompense du roi George III pour services rendus au gouvernement britannique pendant la guerre de l'indépendance américaine. British Library, Maps K Top.119.15. © British Library Board.

## Un village mohawk

Un dessin d'un village mohawk sur la rivière Grand évoque un bourg anglais plutôt qu'un campement autochtone avec son drapeau britannique flottant au-dessus des maisons. Ce village est celui de Joseph Brant, qui sera récompensé à deux occasions par le roi George III pour ses loyaux services pendant la guerre d'Indépendance américaine. Brant utilisera les sommes reçues pour bâtir ce village et son imposante église. L'inclusion de ce village mohawk dans l'album suggère l'assimilation des autochtones qui auraient adopté le mode de vie anglais.

John Graves Simcoe avait une vision très précise de son rôle en tant que représentant du roi au Canada. Dans une lettre envoyée au botaniste Joseph Banks, il écrit que son but est « d'établir un gouvernement anglais libre [...] ce que le gouvernement actuel ne fait pas<sup>3</sup> » (traduction de l'auteur). L'historien Fred D. Schneider pense que

3. « A free honourable British Government and a pure Administration of its Laws which shall hold out to the solitary Emigrant,

Simcoe voulait « un gouvernement colonial qui serait semblable à celui de l'Angleterre, étayé par un système social basé sur une aristocratie terrienne<sup>4</sup> » (traduction de l'auteur), classe à laquelle John Simcoe appartenait grâce à l'héritage parental de sa femme. John Graves Simcoe aurait écrit qu'il accepterait de retourner au Canada en tant que Gouverneur général (Fryer 1989, 172) à une condition : l'attribution d'une pairie par le roi. Si l'on se fie au *Times*, il aurait été considéré pour ce poste puisqu'il est annoncé en août 1797 que le général Simcoe « obtiendra le gouvernement du Canada<sup>5</sup> » (traduction de l'auteur). Cependant, il ne recevra jamais de pairie ni ne retournera au Canada. Il sera plutôt nommé commandant en chef de l'Inde, mais mourra avant de s'y rendre en 1806.

Le rôle d'Elizabeth Simcoe est digne d'attention. L'album et la carte représentent un geste politique important soulignant le travail accompli tout en ouvrant une porte sur le futur. Lors de son séjour au Canada, Elizabeth a tenu un journal quotidien dont elle envoyait des copies en Angleterre; elle y critique les cartes existantes, les corrige sous le mentorat de son époux et prend des notes. L'album et la carte témoignent de sa curiosité devant des paysages inconnus, de son intérêt pour la cartographie et de sa loyauté envers le projet colonial canadien de son époux.

### À propos de l'auteur

Denis Longchamps is the Executive Director at the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery. From 2013 to 2018, he was the Artistic Director and Chief Curator at the Art Gallery of Burlington. He received his PhD in art history in 2009 from Concordia University. He also taught art and craft history at Concordia University, York University, and Dawson College. He has contributed essays, articles, and reviews to magazines and journals, including *Espace-Sculpture*, *Ceramics Monthly*, and *Ceramics: Art and Perception*. In 2020, Longchamps was the recipient of the Craft Ontario John and Barbara Mather Award for Lifetime Achievement.

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# Sous le vent de l'île, or 1.47 (1947)

*by* Brian Foss

**COMING SOON**



# Stanrock Tailings Wall, Elliot Lake, Ontario (1985)

by John O'Brian



*Robert Del Tredici, Stanrock Tailings Wall, Elliot Lake, Ontario, 1985. Gelatin silver photograph. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. <https://nonuclear.se/deltredici.c5.stanrock.tailings.html>.*

Canada has been a major producer of uranium ore since the Second World War. Uranium mined in Canada was used to make the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to produce weapons for the nuclear arsenal of the United States and Britain during the Cold War. It was also used to operate the CANDU reactor, an atomic furnace designed by Canada to produce electric power. The CANDU was sold abroad for civilian purposes, but India used it to manufacture plutonium for its atomic bomb. Canada's nuclear footprint has had a global impact since the beginning of the atomic era. This footprint is strikingly represented in photographs, which play a pivotal role in shaping our understanding of nuclear events. I have argued that the catastrophes of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl, and Fukushima are part of collective memory mostly because of the existence

of photographs.<sup>1</sup> Emblematic photographs. Few aspects of the nuclear environment have escaped the camera's gaze. Uranium mining is no exception.

## Toxic landscapes

*Stanrock Tailings Wall, Elliot Lake, Ontario* is a black-and-white horizontal photograph taken by the Montreal artist Robert Del Tredici. At first glance, it looks like an homage to paintings of flooded landscapes by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, such as Thomson's *Northern River*, which the artist referred to as his "swamp painting."

The dead trees and the mud in the foreground and middle ground of the photograph appear to have occurred naturally. But on closer inspection, the lifeless trees and the ooze surrounding them are revealed to be artificial. Visible at the top of the image is a ten-metre high wall of **waste tailings** from uranium mining in the **Elliot Lake** region of Ontario, once called "the uranium capital of the world." Waste tailings can be up to six times more radioactive than uranium itself. The tailings have been dumped into the natural environment by the Stanrock mine, which operated from 1958-1970, and the photograph depicts a wasteland of toxic sludge that has killed the vegetation around it. In *Stanrock Tailings Wall* we are looking at a landscape defeated by human actions.

The Stanrock uranium tailings pond and others like it contaminated the Serpent River system that flows south from Elliot Lake into Georgian Bay on Lake Huron. In *This Is My Homeland*, Lorraine Rekmans remarks that the lakes in the region "were used as a dumping ground for radioactive waste . . . The ground-waters under the tailings basins are virtual rivers of poison."<sup>2</sup> The poisoned rivers to which she refers flow onto the



Tom Thomson, *Northern River*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 115.1 x 102 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Public domain.

lands of the Serpent River First Nation and have adversely affected the health of its inhabitants. The lands were also used to build a manufacturing plant that supplied the mines with sulphuric acid, a leaching agent used to extract uranium from the ground. The artist Bonnie Devine, a member of the Serpent River First Nation, has produced a large mixed media drawing of the sulphur pile used to produce the acid. The dazzling yellow of the sulphur contrasts with the deadening greys and blacks of the polluted land surrounding it. Her drawing functions as a companion piece to Del Tredici's photograph. It represents another defeated landscape.

## In the fields of the bomb

*Stanrock Tailings Wall* is published in *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb*, a ground-breaking book by Del Tredici that aims to reveal what nuclear authorities have tried to keep hidden since the invention of nuclear

1. John O'Brian, *The Bomb in the Wilderness: Photography and the Nuclear Era in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), and John O'Brian, ed., *Camera Atomica* (London: Black Dog; Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015).
2. Lorraine Rekmans, ed., *This Is My Homeland* (Cutler, ON: Serpent River First Nation, 2003), 5.

weapons. The book sets the standard for publications on nuclear activities that combine photographs with text. Del Tredici writes in the introduction that he wants to show “the nuclear arsenal at its source” and to use photographs such as *Stanrock Tailings Wall* to represent the activities of the nuclear industry.<sup>3</sup> These activities include uranium mining and refining; scientific research and development; reactor design and construction; weapons assembly and testing; and toxic waste disposal. At the centre of the industry is uranium, the mother element that generates nuclear energy. It is the foundational ingredient in nuclear weapons.



Robert Del Tredici, *Sampling the Derby*, 1985. Gelatin silver photograph. Courtesy of the artist. All rights reserved. <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/library/media-gallery/image/tredici/18.htm>.

*At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* counters the forces of secrecy and abstraction by putting the human body in the nuclear machine. One photograph shows an employee, who works with the dangerous material eight hours a day, collecting shavings from a block of refined uranium called a “derby” for testing in a lab. She is touching the block, which emits alpha, beta, and gamma radiation. She wears overalls, rubber gloves, safety glasses and earrings, and has a flower in her hair because it is the week before Christmas. Like *Stanrock Tailings Wall*, this photograph is a “counterimage.”<sup>4</sup> It provides a critical alternative to the mushroom cloud imagery that dominates nuclear photography. A mushroom cloud tells us that an atomic bomb has exploded, but shares little about the mass destruction occurring beneath it.

## Radioactive gravesites

The photographs in *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* are carefully organized by Del Tredici to tell a story. *Stanrock Tailings Wall* represents a radioactive site in Ontario that will remain hazardous for thousands of years. The image preceding it in the book is of a train, shunted into a siding near Munich, that is loaded with milk powder contaminated by the fallout from Chernobyl. In an effort to get rid of the radioactive product, the local government tried to sell the milk powder to Egypt. The photograph immediately following *Stanrock Tailings Wall* is of granite markers designating buried radioactive material at a waste disposal site in South Carolina. The markers look like gravestones.

The sequence of photographs contributes to a narrative about radioactive contamination, alerting us to threats that we would not otherwise know about. It also contributes to a narrative about Canada’s participation in a global network of nuclear industry. The participation is not always benign, as *Stanrock Tailings Wall* vividly demonstrates. Del Tredici’s photograph of a poisoned landscape deserves to be as widely known as Thomson’s *Northern River*.

### About the author

John O’Brian is an art historian, writer, and curator. He is best known for his books on modern art, including *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (1986), and for his exhibitions on nuclear photography such as *Camera Atomica*, organized for the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2015. From 1987-2017 he

3. Robert Del Tredici, *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987), ix.

4. Blake Fitzpatrick and Robert Del Tredici, *The Atomic Photographers Guild: Visibility and Invisibility in the Nuclear Era* (Toronto: Gallery TPW, 2001).

taught art history at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, where he held the Brenda & David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies (2008-11) and was an Associate of the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies. He has been a critic of neoconservative policies since the start of the Culture Wars in the 1980s. He is a recipient of the Thakore Award in Human Rights and Peace Studies from Simon Fraser University.

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# Terry Fox Memorial (2011)

by Efrat El-Hanany



*Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial, 2011. Bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable. BC Place, Vancouver, BC. Photograph: BC Place.*

In the shadow of BC Place Stadium in Vancouver, passers-by encounter a line of four bronze statues of a young man running on a prosthetic leg. This memorial commemorates Canadian icon Terry Fox. Each of the four figures is a slight variant on the previous pose, and each grows from life-size to twice that. Spaced equally about half a meter apart, the statues are installed by a simulated highway marked out in darker paving stones. The smoothly finished surfaces of the bronzes display a traditional greenish-brown patina. With muscles tensed, foreheads wrinkled, and determined—even pained—facial expressions suggesting Fox's struggle and determination. Realistic and dynamic, the bronze figures invite visitors to run beside them by being situated at ground level. At the front of the plaza, the largest image of Fox—symbolically heroic in scale—stands directly on his prosthesis with his left biological leg lifted off the ground. He raises his right arm in a welcoming wave, while

his left hand is clenched in a fist—encouraging viewers to confront the magnitude of his accomplishment and legacy.



*Terry Fox running in his Marathon of Hope, May 25, 1980. Photograph: The Terry Fox Foundation.*

## Marathon of Hope

In 1980, the young Canadian athlete Terry Fox, who had grown up in British Columbia and had lost his right leg to cancer, embarked on an ambitious cross-country run using a prosthetic leg. His journey, known as the Marathon of Hope, was intended to raise funds and awareness for cancer research. The run began on April 12, 1980, in St. John's, Newfoundland, and was intended to conclude in Victoria, British Columbia. As Fox made his way from town to town across Canada, his fame grew exponentially. He set himself a grueling 26 mile daily regime, eventually covering over 3,339 miles in 143 days. Having completed half of his projected journey, Fox ended his run near Thunder Bay, Ontario, on September 1. He died the following year at the age of 22.

In a letter to the Canadian Cancer Society (October 15, 1979), Fox explained why he felt compelled to do the run:

The night before my amputation, my former basketball coach brought me a magazine with an article on an amputee who ran in the New York Marathon. It was then I decided to meet this new challenge head



on and not only overcome my disability, but conquer it in such a way that I could never look back and say it disabled me.<sup>1</sup>

The artist Douglas Coupland has noted just how profound Fox's action was in the 1970s:

It's important to remember that in 1979 people with disabilities . . . didn't participate in the everyday world the way they do now. For someone with one leg to enter a race of this length was quite shocking.<sup>2</sup>

Terry Fox immediately became a Canadian cultural icon, and starting with a statue in Thunder Bay, public monuments to his memory have appeared in cities across Canada.

## A different kind of memorial



*Douglas Coupland, Terry Fox Memorial, 2011. Bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable. BC Place, Vancouver, BC. Photograph: Ross. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

Three decades after the Marathon of Hope, Vancouver-based novelist, designer, and visual artist Douglas Coupland was commissioned by the BC Pavilion Corporation to design a new public memorial to Terry Fox for BC Place Stadium in Vancouver. In this busy location, adjacent to a popular sports venue, the monument would be accessible to a large and diverse audience. Working with sculptor Stephen Harman, Coupland's guiding principle was public legibility—the importance of Fox's story had to be made clear to passers-by. The result is a memorial that is relatively conventional in terms of its material—bronze—and in its straightforward representational approach. In this sense it matches expectations for public statues and invites a broad cross-section of the public to remember Terry Fox. In fact, the choice of materials was largely to ensure the work's permanence: as the artist stated at the 2011 unveiling, he wanted people living a thousand years from now to understand Fox's achievement.

Coupland used photographs and videos for reference, specifically a series of sequential photographs that illustrated the four movements that made up Fox's running style. This distinctive hop-and-skip gait became a symbol of the Marathon of Hope in the minds of many Canadians. Fox discussed his unique stride: "Some people can't figure out what I'm doing. It's not a walk-hop, it's not a trot, it's running, or as close as I can get to running, and it's harder than doing it on two legs."<sup>3</sup> By separating out the different postures

of Fox's gait and by multiplying and sequentially enlarging his image, Coupland emphasized a prolonged process of pain, struggle, and courage, saying: "You realized through the run that there wasn't one single step he took where his body wasn't in some kind of pain, large or small. . . . Boy, it really puts you in your place."<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Coupland intended the growing height of each figure to symbolize the increasing fame and importance of the subject as the Marathon of Hope progressed.

Coupland made no attempt to beautify or idealize Fox's proportions, facial features, or pose. Instead, he invites viewers to embrace a new set of standards regarding diverse representations of the human body in public art.

1. Frank Cosentino, *Not Bad, Eh?: Great Moments in Canadian Sports History* (Burnstown, ON: General Store Publishing House, 1990), 63.

2. Douglas Coupland, *Terry* (Toronto: Douglas & Macintyre, 2005), 29.

3. Leslie Scrivener, *Terry Fox: His Story* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart/Penguin Random House, 2000), 108.

4. Tim Weeks and Terry Donnelly, "New Terry Fox Memorial Unveiled in Vancouver," *CBC News*, September 16, 2011.

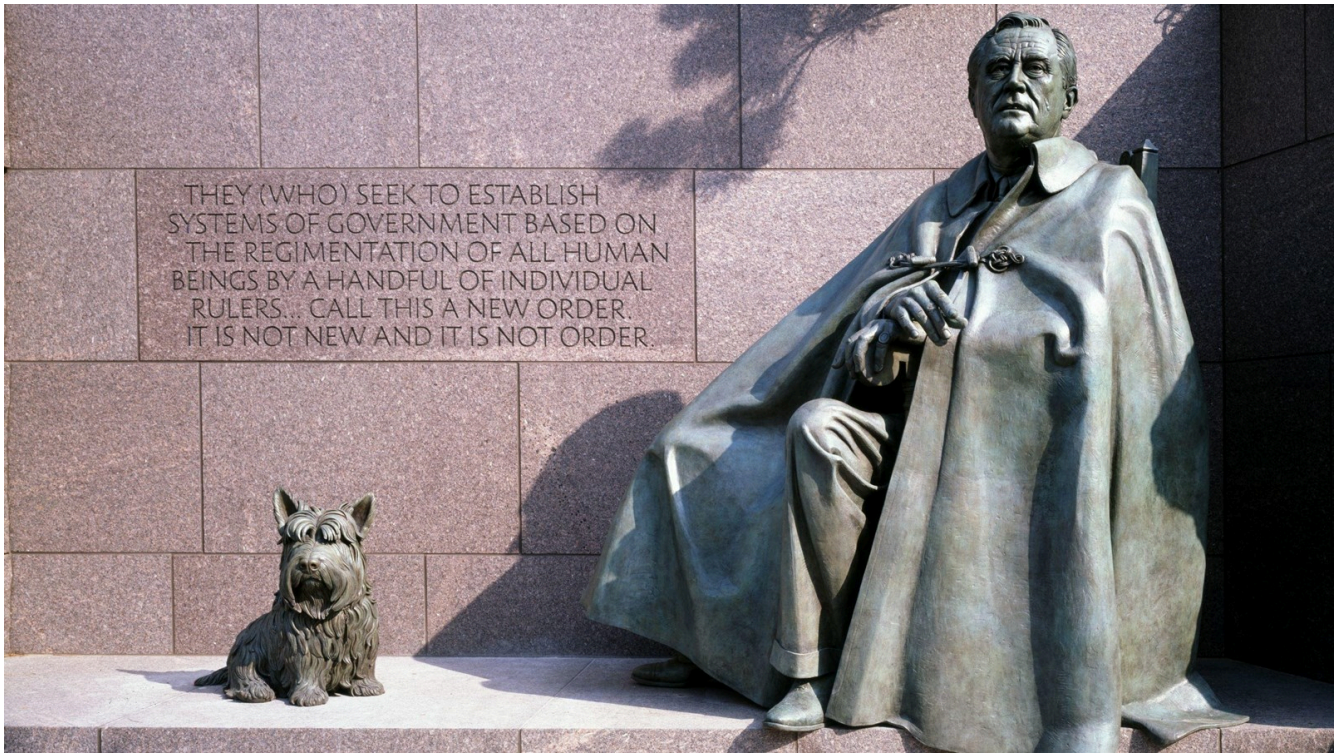
It is notable that the fourth and largest of the four statues depicts Fox standing erect and determined on his prosthesis. All other earlier Fox monuments across Canada—notably those in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Burnaby, and Victoria—show him leaning forward to take his weight on his biological leg, which serves to move his body toward his goal. In Coupland’s work, the prosthesis has become a full part of Terry, and his “disability” is not hidden but brought forward and validated.



Left: Edwin Railton, E.H. Bailey, and Sir Edwin Landseer, *Nelson's Column*, 1840–43. Granite and bronze, 51.6 m. Trafalgar Square, London. Photograph: Elliott Brown. CC BY 2.0. Right: Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, *Peter Stuyvesant*, 1941. Granite and bronze, 243.8 cm. Photograph: Wally Gobetz. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

There are several famous examples of disabled figures in earlier **Western** public statuary—Edward Baily’s Lord Nelson in London’s Trafalgar Square, or Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s Governor Peter Stuyvesant in New York. Both historical figures had missing limbs, yet their bronze representations follow traditional nineteenth-century formulas for heroic monuments. They are raised above the viewer on tall pedestals, and their disabilities—if not totally concealed—are minimized.





*Neil Estern, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Fala, 1997. Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Washington, D.C. Photograph: Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress.*

More recently, an over-life size statue of President Franklin D. Roosevelt by artist Neil Estern caused some debate when unveiled at the new FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 1997. Controversy arose when historians and disability-rights advocates noted that the president's disability and wheelchair had been concealed underneath a large cloak, following the precedent of public images of FDR made during his lifetime. (In 2001, a new life-size statue of FDR was added to the Memorial; following recommendations that the president's wheelchair be shown openly in the interests of historical accuracy and the need to inspire people in comparable circumstances, artist Bob Graham depicted FDR sitting in a wheelchair similar to the one he actually used.)



Interestingly, it was in the same year that Bill Koochin's stone statue of Canadian athlete Rick Hansen in his wheelchair was installed in Vancouver without incident. In this case, however, Hansen's achievement was clearly linked to his disability, and images of him engaging in athletic activities in his wheelchair were widely known. This new kind of frank realism in public monuments invites viewers to interact with a new set of aesthetic and ethical ideals. As Susan Wendell reminds us in her book, *The Rejected Body*, "the lack of realistic cultural representations of experiences of disability not only contributes to the 'Otherness' of people with disabilities by encouraging the assumption that their lives are inconceivable to non-disabled people but also increases non-disabled people's fear of disability by suppressing knowledge of how people live with disabilities."<sup>5</sup> Marc Quinn's landmark representation of artist Alison Lapper also comes to mind, and in this context Coupland's monument in Vancouver appears as the culmination of a long series of public works that represent differently abled figures in a heroic guise.



Bill Koochin, *Man in Motion*, 1997. Granite. Photograph: Rebelrat (Fred). CC BY 2.0.



Douglas Coupland, *Terry Fox Memorial* (detail from behind), 2011. Bronze and mixed media, dimensions variable. BC Place, Vancouver, BC. Photograph: Karen Lee Photography. CC BY-SA 2.0.

5. Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 43.

## A participatory monument in a digital age

Coupland's monument replaced an earlier Fox monument on the site, created in 1984 by architect Franklin Allen and artist Ian Bateson. This had taken the form of a postmodern, Roman-inspired triumphal arch, topped by stylized lions—traditional Western symbols of strength and heroism—on each corner of the roof. This design met with an immediate and ongoing negative reaction from the public, partly because many felt that it did not reflect Fox's humble personality. Most importantly, it initially contained no actual representation of Fox (at a later date a larger-than-life etching of the athlete, as well as a map showing his journey across Canada, were added by artist Ian Bateson.) But Coupland's new monument introduces a powerfully immersive approach to its subject that differs from all the earlier—and perhaps more traditional—monuments to Fox.

Coupland invites the viewer to recreate the spirit and energy of Fox's run by providing an experiential and participatory component. This typifies a trend in many contemporary monuments that aim to actively engage visitors in a physical interaction rather than encourage passive contemplation. In this case, visitors can run beside the statues of Fox, installed at ground level, on the simulated highway to one side. The receding lines of the highway, in combination with the differing heights of the figures, create a forced perspective that suggests Fox moving toward us from a distant point of origin. Approaching the monument from across the street, visitors may feel that they are witnessing a segment of Fox's run all over again. In an interview with a local newspaper, Coupland also suggested that he “wanted to create something that people could interact with on a digital level.”<sup>6</sup> He demonstrated his intention by picking up an iPhone, suggesting that visitors could create their own photographic animations of Terry's run. Coupland's monument, with its naturalistic approach, participatory goals, and outreach to our own digital age is intended to inspire current and future generations with Terry Fox's belief that “anything's possible if you try; dreams are made possible if you try.”<sup>7</sup>

### About the author

Dr. Efrat El-Hanany is a faculty member in the Art History Department at Capilano University in North Vancouver, British Columbia. She graduated from Hebrew University in Jerusalem with a BA in Art History and East Asian Studies and a BA in Education. She earned an MA and a PhD from Indiana University in Bloomington. Her PhD dissertation, “Beating the Devil: Images of the Madonna del Soccorso in Italian Renaissance Art” (2006), focuses on issues of iconography, gender, and social and religious history. Her engagement with art history has taken many forms, with interests in contemporary art and the art of China. Her publications in these fields include the 2005 article “Sex in the Imperial Garden: An Unpublished Chinese Pillow Book in the Kinsey Institute,” in *Apollo: The International Magazine of the Arts*, and her paper “The Heroics of Disability: The Terry Fox Monument Phenomenon” presented at the CAA Annual Conference in New York (2015).

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# Transformation Masks

by Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank



*Kwakwaka'wakw artist (Alert Bay, Vancouver Island, British Columbia), Eagle Mask (closed), late 19th century. Cedar wood, feathers, sinew, cord, bird skin, hide, plant fibers, cotton, iron, pigments, 37 x 57 x 49 cm. American Museum of Natural History.*

## Transformation

Imagine a man standing before a large fire wearing the heavy eagle mask shown above and a long cedar bark costume on his body. He begins to dance, the firelight flickers and the feathers rustle as he moves about the room in front of hundreds of people. Now, imagine him pulling the string that opens the mask, he is transformed into something else entirely—what a powerful and dramatic moment!

Northwest Coast transformation masks manifest transformation, usually an animal changing into a mythical being or one animal becoming another. Masks are worn by dancers during ceremonies, they pull strings to open and move the mask—in effect, animating it. In the Eagle mask shown above from the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, you can see the wooden frame and netting that held the mask on the

dancer's head. When the cords are pulled, the eagle's face and beak split down the center, and the bottom of the beak opens downwards, giving the impression of a bird spreading its wings (see image below). Transformed, the mask reveals the face of an ancestor.

A Transformation Mask at the Brooklyn Museum (below) shows a Thunderbird, but when opened it reveals a human face flanked on either side by two lightning snakes called *sisiutl*, and with another bird below it and a small figure in black above it.

A whale transformation mask, such as the one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (below), gives the impression that the whale is swimming. The mouth opens and closes, the tail moves upwards and downwards, and the flippers extend outwards but also retract inwards.

Transformation masks, like those belonging to the Kwakwaka'wakw (pronounced Kwak-wak-ah-wak, a Pacific Northwest Coast indigenous people) and illustrated here, are worn during a potlatch, a ceremony where the host displayed his status, in part by giving away gifts to those in attendance. These masks were only one part of a costume that also included a cloak made of red cedar bark. During a potlatch, Kwakwaka'wakw dancers perform wearing the mask and costume. The masks conveyed social position (only those with a certain status could wear them) and also helped to portray a family's genealogy by displaying (family) crest symbols.

## The Kwakwaka'wakw

Masks are not the same across the First Nations of the Northwest Coastal areas; here we focus solely on Kwakwaka'wakw transformation masks.

The Kwakwaka'wakw ("Kwak'wala speaking tribes") are generally called Kwakiutl by non-Native peoples. They are one of many indigenous groups that live on the western coast of British Columbia, Canada. The mythology and cosmology of different Kwakwaka'wakw Nations (such as the Kwagu'ł (Kwakiutl) or 'Namgis) is extremely diverse, although there are commonalities. For instance, many groups relate that deceased ancestors roamed the world, transforming themselves in the process (this might entail removing their animal skins or masks to reveal their human selves within).

Kwakwaka'wakw bands are arranged into four clans (Killer Whale, Eagle, Raven, and Wolf clans). The clans are divided into *numayn* (or '*na'mina*'), which can be loosely translated as "group of fellows of the same kind" (essentially groups that shared a common ancestor). *Numayns* were responsible for safe-guarding crest symbols and for conveying their specific rights—which might include access to natural resources (like salmon fishing areas) and rights to sacred names and dances that related to a *numayn*'s ancestor or the group's origins. The *numayn* were ranked, and typically only one person could fill a spot at any given moment in time. Each rank entailed specific rights, including ceremonial privileges—like the right to wear a mask such as the Brooklyn Museum's Thunderbird transformation mask. Animal transformation masks contained crests for a given *numayn*. Ancestral entities and supernatural forces temporarily embody dancers wearing these masks and other ceremonial regalia.

## Animals and myths

Many myths relate moments of transformation often involving trickster supernaturals (a trickster is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman, or anthropomorphic animal who exhibits a great degree of intellect or secret knowledge and uses it to play tricks or otherwise disobey normal rules and conventional behavior). Raven, for instance, is known as a consummate trickster—he often changes into other creatures, and helps humans by providing them with a variety of useful things such as the sun, moon, fire, and salmon. Thunderbird (*Kwankwanxwalige'*), who was a mythical ancestor of the Kwakwaka'wakw, also figures prominently in

mythology. He is believed to cause thunder when he beats his wings, and lightning comes from his eyes. He lives in the celestial realm, and he can remove his bird skin to assume human form.

## Design and materials

The masks illustrated here display a variety of brightly colored surfaces filled with complex forms. These masks use elements of the *formline* style, a term coined in 1965 to describe the characteristics of Northwest Coast visual culture. The Brooklyn Museum mask provides a clear example of what constitutes the *formline* style. For instance, The Brooklyn Museum mask (when open) displays a color palette of mostly red, blue-green, and black, which is consistent with other *formline* objects like a Tlingit Raven Screen (a house partition screen) attributed to Kadyisdu.axch' (detail below). The masks, whether opened or closed, are bilaterally symmetrical. Typical of the *formline* style is the use of an undulating, calligraphic line. Also, note how the pupils of the eyes on the exterior of the Brooklyn Museum mask are ovoid shapes, similar to the figures and forms found on the interior surfaces of many masks. This ovoid shape, along with s- and u-forms, are common features of the *formline* style.

The American Museum of Natural History and Brooklyn Museum masks are carved of red cedar wood, an important and common material used for many Northwest Coast objects and buildings. Masks take months, sometimes years, to create. Because they are made of wood and other organic materials that quickly decay, most masks date to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (even though we know that the practice extends much farther into the past). In fact, the artistic style of many transformation masks it thought to have emerged over a thousand years ago.

With the introduction and enforcement of Christianity and as a result of colonization in the nineteenth century, masking practices changed among peoples of the Northwest Coast. Prior to contact with Russians, Europeans, and Euro-Americans, masks like the Brooklyn Museum's Thunderbird Transformation Mask, were not carved using metal tools. After iron tools were introduced along with other materials and equipment, masks demonstrate different carving techniques. Earlier masks used natural (plant and mineral based) pigments, post-contact, brighter and more durable synthetic colors were introduced. The open mask from the American Museum of Natural History, for example, displays bright red, yellow, and blue.

## Ceremonies and potlatches

Masks passed between family members of a specific clan (they could be inherited or gifted). They were just one sign of a person's status and rank, which were important to demonstrate within Kwakwaka'wakw society—especially during a potlatch. Franz Boas, an anthropologist who worked in this area between 1885 and 1930, noted that “The acquisition of a high position and the maintenance of its dignity require correct marriages and wealth—wealth accumulated by industry and by loaning out property at interest—dissipated at the proper time, albeit with the understanding that each recipient of a gift has to return it with interest at a time when he is dissipating his wealth. This is the general principle underlying the potlatch....”<sup>1</sup>

Potlatches were banned in 1885 until the 1950s because they were considered immoral by Christian missionaries who believed cannibalism occurred (for its part, the Canadian Government thought potlatches hindered economic development because people ceased work during these ritual celebrations). With the

1. Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 51. It is important to mention that Boas is a controversial figure for many, especially because of his active acquisition of objects and skeletons belonging to different First Nations. Much of what he collected is today in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

prohibition of potlatches, many masks were confiscated. Those that weren't destroyed often made their way into museums or private collections. When the ban against potlatches was removed by the Canadian government, many First Nations have attempted to regain possession of the masks and other objects that had been taken from them. Potlatches are still practiced today among Northwest Coast peoples.

### About the author

Dr. Lauren G. Kilroy-Ewbank is the Contributing Editor for Latin American Colonial and Native American/First Nations art. She received her PhD in Art History from the University of California Los Angeles. Much of her research focuses on religious art in New Spain, emotions, women in art, and digital art history. In 2013, she received a Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation Fellowship for Excellence in Teaching at Brooklyn College, CUNY, where she was an Assistant Professor of Art History until 2015. She was a tenured Associate Professor of Art History at Pepperdine University from 2015–2020. Now, she has joined Smarthistory as the Dean of Content and Strategy.

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*This essay was previously published on Smarthistory.*

# The World Famous Gopher Hole Museum, Torrington, Alberta (1996—)

by Lianne McTavish



*G.A.G.S. diorama, World Famous Gopher Hole Museum, Torrington, Alberta. Photograph: smithco. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.*

The Gopher Hole Museum is, indeed, world famous. Located in an isolated hamlet in southern Alberta, and open only during the summer months, the small museum attracts some 6,000 tourists per year, including many from outside of Canada. Since its foundation in 1996, the Gopher Hole Museum in Torrington has been featured in newspaper reports, award-winning films, documentaries, scholarly articles, and fan websites. Visitors navigate the back roads of rural Alberta to find the site. After paying the \$2.00 entry fee, they walk through a darkened gallery to peer inside a series of colourful **dioramas** containing gophers—otherwise known as Richardson's ground squirrels—that have been stuffed, clothed, and arranged to enact scenes of small-town life. Settings include Torrington's former beauty parlour, pool hall, and diner, as well as its existing curling rink and playground. These representations are amusing, but they are also complex. The dioramas reshape conventional museum practices to challenge long-standing assumptions about the authority and educational function of

museums. Taking the Gopher Hole Museum seriously is part of a broader movement in **critical museum studies** that turns away from an exclusive focus on large, urban museums to consider the contributions made by the grassroots museums found in many North American small towns and rural areas.

## Debating gophers

The Gopher Hole Museum gained notoriety even before it officially opened. In 1995, representatives of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sent letters of protest to the mayor of Torrington, asking that prefabricated models be used in the exhibits, instead of **taxidermy** gopher corpses. The museum organizers responded by sending PETA a card advising its members to “get stuffed.” The ensuing controversy attracted global media coverage, inspiring people from as far away as Germany and Japan to write letters both in favour of and in opposition to Torrington’s new museum. The diorama shown above commemorates this debate. Two gophers play tug of war with the body of a third animal. One of the two gophers, representing Torrington’s mayor, is dressed in conservative nineteenth-century garb such as a navy vest, bow tie, and top hat. He asserts, “This one is needed for the museum,” while battling his rival, a bearded “hippie” gopher adorned with a long ponytail and a purple poncho, who shouts, “Save the endangered species!!” The handmade sign beside the hippie gopher proclaims his affiliation with G.A.G.S., or Gophers Against Getting Stuffed. The hippie gopher attempts to take not only the animal that he grasps, but also the right to determine its meaning.

The local people who founded the museum, sourced both living and dead gophers, and made the diorama have insisted on their first-hand knowledge of gophers, arguing that the animals are far from endangered; in fact, they are abundant throughout the region, and regularly damage crops and livestock with their burrows. At the same time, the museum founders have displayed the protest letters alongside the G.A.G.S. diorama, allowing visitors to read them and make up their own minds about the issue. This openness is continued throughout the museum, which lacks explanatory labels or a unified narrative. Visitors participate in the production of meaning, while chatting with the friendly volunteer staff at the museum and taking as many photographs as they like. The Gopher Hole Museum embraces its role as a site of debate, sociability, and pleasure, at odds with the reserved and authoritative position often adopted in large, urban museums that aim to “improve” visitors.

## Expanding the museum

“It’s not the Louvre!” This comment from a review on Tripadvisor warns visitors not to expect a grandiose structure filled with valuable art objects or archival documents when they encounter the Gopher Hole Museum. The unconventional museum was primarily designed to bring people into Torrington and bolster its economy. Despite lacking historically important artifacts, the museum preserves the rural **heritage** of the area by celebrating Torrington’s past as an active agricultural centre. Current and former residents of the region can recognize the historically specific details of almost every diorama. The dispute between the gophers takes place, for example, in front of the former Village Office as it looked from 1979 until 1997, when it was vacated because the town had dissolved into a hamlet. Although most of the buildings in the area, including the grain elevators portrayed in another diorama, are now demolished, they are playfully revived inside the Gopher Hole Museum alongside scenes of the community picnics, fashion shows, and yard sales that were held annually when Torrington was larger.

Outsiders may not be aware of the museum’s important role in the community. Some tourists initially perceive the displays as weird, strange, or quaint, reinforcing stereotypes that position rural people outside of modernity and progress. Yet many online reviewers of the Gopher Hole Museum appreciate the skill required



to produce the dioramas, while admiring the adaptability and resilience of the people of Torrington. Although surprised by the exhibitions at the Gopher Hole Museum, most visitors embrace the opportunity to rethink the idea that museums should be filled with historic objects whose meanings are explained by professional scholars.

## Natural history museums, gender, and the handmade

The Gopher Hole Museum is in some ways traditional, for it alludes to the early history of museums in Canada, informed by the colonial museum conventions largely developed in Europe and the United Kingdom. The taxidermy gophers recall the contents of the natural history museums that were established during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in cities and small towns. Self-trained museum founders sought to promote local resources by displaying taxidermy mammals and

birds as well as insects, minerals, fossils, dried plants, and samples of lumber to the public. Such natural history museums often featured dioramas in which taxidermy animals were placed within recreated landscape settings designed to mimic nature. In contrast, the dioramas inside the Gopher Hole Museum anthropomorphize the stuffed gophers, portraying them as people within artificial rather than natural settings. The dioramas thus point to the deliberate reconstruction of nature, while suggesting that museums are also culturally produced, not monolithic organizations that present visitors with authoritative truths about the world.

The dioramas in Torrington were largely crafted by local women, a gendered aspect portrayed on the exterior signage of the Gopher Hole Museum, which shows a maternal gopher in the act of knitting. This hand-painted reference to a task traditionally associated with women invokes the role of women in the creation of early museums in Canada, including natural history museums. Female members of natural history societies participated in collecting and arranging museum display items and organized museum fundraising events. The Gopher Hole Museum continues this tradition by featuring in its gift shop the gopher costumes and other items handmade by local women. This content celebrates the skills and values of rural women, revealing their role in creating cultural organizations that sustain the community.



*Exterior, World Famous Gopher Hole Museum, Torrington, Alberta. Photograph: Mack Male from Edmonton, AB, Canada.*

## Conclusions

The Gopher Hole Museum in Torrington is inventive, funny, open-ended, and critically engaging. It challenges assumptions about what museums are and should become, while celebrating the knowledge and skills of the local people, especially rural women, who preserve the heritage of their town by reworking the history of early museums in Canada.

### About the author

Lianne McTavish is Professor of the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta. She offers courses in early modern visual culture and critical museum theory. Her research has been generously funded by, among other sources, the Social Sciences and Humanities

Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Killam Research Fund. McTavish has published many articles, edited collections, and has completed four single-authored monographs, including *Defining the Modern Museum* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) and *Voluntary Detours: Small-Town and Rural Museums in Alberta* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021). She regularly curates exhibitions of contemporary art.

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# STUDENT OBJECT STORIES



# Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet (2013)

*by* Kaliyah Macaraig





Nestled within the quiet Bay street corridor, away from the bustling urban activity of the city you can find two bronze sculptures of children sitting on concrete plinths looking across at one another—immigrant youth of the past. The profound juxtaposition of Canada's settler history and the physical, lifelike presence of this work calls us to ask: who are these children and why are they here? The physical and sensorial experience of viewing the sculpture is a gateway to investigate uniting and competing conceptions of Canadian histories, Canadian identity, and the formation of communities within urban spaces.



Ken Lum, *Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet* (detail), 2013. Photograph: Kaliyah Macaraig, 2022.

## Breaking boundaries

Ken Lum's *Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet* is situated in a walkway space leading off of Bay Street, just west of the Eaton Centre and north of City Hall. The corridor space is created by a looming condo on one side and a brick wall on the other, rendering this transitory area as visually inaccessible unless physically entered.

In contrast to the concrete blocks on which they perch, the two bronze children are naturalistically rendered. The boy wears traditional Chinese clothing, closely related to the clothing worn during the Qing dynasty including the six paneled "Little Hat," and the tunic with a mandarin collar

and frog buttons which were popular during this period.<sup>1</sup> The girl wears a simple collared, long sleeve dress with a bandana tying her hair. These figures are placed against the northern wall of the corridor, sitting and facing one another on elevated stone pillars, several metres apart. The children lean on their arms and cross their legs, indicating comfort but their engaged muscles demonstrate a lingering sense of tension. A glimmer of anticipation is further evinced through their contemplative gazes into the distance, as if the children are waiting or even searching for something. A bordered and elevated area of greenery stretches between the bases of the stone pillars to subtly demarcate the space between the children as part of the artwork, and the sidewalk as the venue of the viewer.

Lum dissolves the barrier between art and life as he brings his created work to the urban space of the city, placing the artwork in a liminal area where everyday, constant interaction takes place. The highly public location of the work and its striking lifelike qualities, naturalism, and out-of-the-box placement creates opportunities for contemplation among a wider audience. The physical and social immersion of the children is essential to Lum's call to contemplate upon humanity and identity.



Ken Lum, *Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet* (detail), 2013. Photograph: Kaliyah Macaraig, 2022.

1. Shaorong Yang, *Traditional Chinese Clothing: Costumes, Adornment and Culture* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2004), 13.

The words on the wall between the two figures reads, “Across time and space, two children of Toronto meet...” The work calls the audience to think about the children’s divergent histories which have preceded their settling in Toronto. Specifically, the figure of the boy in traditional clothing is symbolic of the Chinese immigrant community through his cultural clothing. In contrast, the figure of the little girl in European dress, becomes a pivotal reminder of Canada’s white immigrant history, which has interacted directly with the Chinese immigrant history in the nation. The poignant decision to depict children, thought of as innocent and unburdened by race and class, prompts the audience to reflect on the intricacies of immigrant histories through the lens of these voiceless youth, thinking about how lives were affected and questions of agency in settling. By facing the children toward one another, Lum uses his art to point towards a complicated web of national settler histories that converge and negotiate with one another, which has taken place in this very area of the downtown core.

Toronto’s Chinese community flourished in various pockets of the city since the late 1800s, but the major displacements that occurred over the early years of the twentieth century are often forgotten. In 1904, a fire destroyed the original Chinatown, resulting in the community’s relocation to the Ward neighbourhood stretching from College Street to Queen Street and Yonge Street to University Avenue. Soon after, from the 1920s to 1960s, Chinatown was demolished and the land expropriated to build the Eaton Centre and City Hall. Decades after the displacement, Lum’s work stands in the Ward as a physical reminder of the neglected Chinese community that was excluded from the creation of a representative urban space those years ago. Lum also remembers the European immigrant community that lived in the Ward through the figure of the little girl, once again pointing toward the intersecting settler histories of this area, largely characterized by economic hardship and villification by the wider public.

## Art as exploration and commemoration

In much of his work, Lum frequently interrogates his own identity, exploring intersections of Chinese identity and Canadian and American identities. His photography, often billboard-scaled, and sculptures of varying materials address contemporary life, culture, and identity.

Raised by his Chinese mother who immigrated to British Columbia his sense of Chinese identity and middle class upbringing often influences his art and writings as he notes: “All my work really is a kind of theory of my upbringing in Canada.”<sup>2</sup> Art becomes a medium of investigation into identity and community for Lum, and his bold and clever works are crafted as opportunities for the public to take on the same investigative stances. The elevation of marginalized and underserved communities through art is a closely related focus for Lum. He spearheads the Monument Lab in Philadelphia, a project focused on promoting public art in the city by conversing with particular communities to determine which people and which values are to be memorialized through public works. This deliberate and conscious approach to creating public art is increasingly employed by local governments who use these works to promote a sense of unity by celebrating all communities, especially those that have been socially and systematically overlooked

## Public art: Building community through visibility and spatiality

Lum’s *Two Children of Toronto* created in 2013 anticipated an extensive public art initiative several years later, in the same vein as the Monument Lab project, with the unveiling of Toronto’s new 10 year public art strategy. The

2. Ken Lum, Interview by Sean O’Neill, *In the Making*, CBC Gem, October 20, 2019.

plan's aim was to fund public art, especially in underserved communities, to create diverse advisory committees, to protect the public art of the city, and to fund and promote opportunities for Indigenous artists to create public works. Civic engagement is a continual focus for this strategy, emphasizing art's ability to unite Toronto as a single community: "advance broader city-building priorities, such as equity and inclusion, environmental resiliency, reconciliation with Indigenous communities, and placemaking, among others."<sup>3</sup> Examining the plan, it is clear that public art is positioned as a means by which specific identities and communities can be celebrated by the larger community through a visually and physically communicative form. Spaces like parks, downtown corners, and waterfronts which house different networks of interaction within communities are prime locations for these artworks to ideally engage with the public, provoke dialogue, and afford a space of belonging for a community through their representative piece. This is essential to the strategy's ultimate goal of equity and inclusion.

Public art and the new strategy in Toronto has a complex relationship with the multiple identities present here. The city's funding of multiple different communities demonstrates the heterogeneity of the denizens of Toronto, each having different symbols and icons that resonate with them, different geographic pockets of the city, and different histories. On the other hand, the strategy pushes the idea that a totalizing Torontonians identity exists, or can be further crystallised, through artwork's ability to unite based on shared values. Public art has the ability to engage with multiple identities at once, whether within or across communities because of its integration into the lived space. Ultimately, an individual's own experiences and identity determines the level of belonging afforded by a public work.

## Negotiating identity

Ken Lum's work explores multiple competing identities within Toronto or the nation at large, with a focus on immigrant and Chinese identities. *Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto* recenters people and communities that have been at the margins of Canada or Toronto as a relational identity by literally placing these identities in highly public space. His work employs physical markers of identity to crystallize and question complex, social frameworks of identity. Lum's art expertly balances the conversations around identity by exploring specific communities and ways of life whilst also being provocative and compelling works that draw all viewers into contemplative modes of thought. These tensions between competing and united identities will continue to be a conversation for artists, governments and communities to engage in.

### About the author

Kaliyah Macaraig is a student at the University of Toronto. She completed an internship with Open Art Histories in the summer of 2022.

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# A Sudden Gust of Wind (1993)

As the sudden gust of wind washes the scene and the figures, a woman on the left looks in shock while concealed by a scarf. The blast blows sheets from her portfolio dispersed into the sky. Men hold their possessions against the force while another person embraces it and looks up, staring at the papers in the trail of the blustery wind, and his garments lean. Trees bend like swinging willows. Leaves drift away. The suburban landscape of brownfields and canals sets the stage under the overcast sky (Tate). The piece of iron on the left adorns the dirt track, hinting at the industrial atmosphere. Small shackles and telegraph poles play a cameo role at the back of this cinematographic performance. The work captures the moment of the splendid play of nature's power and human helplessness against the sublime through the depiction of artificiality.

## **A Sudden Gust of Wind and Its Japanese Predecessor**

The work is a large, back-lighted colour photograph made by Canadian photographer Jeff Wall in 1993. The composition and photographed subjects are based on Katsushika Hokusai's woodcut from The Thirty-six Views of Fuji series (Need Link). It may seem the photo was taken at the perfect timing, but do not let it fool you. The composition was staged with the help of actors in Vancouver, an international hub for cinema and television production. It also wasn't spontaneous, Wall waited for the perfect weather for five months. After taking the shot, Wall collaged the photograph digitally to resemble the Japanese wood print. Combining the modern western art medium of photography with a traditional east Asian work, he renders the photo with transculturality and internationality.

So what makes this photo an epitome of Vancouver history, and perhaps even one of the most representative pieces of Canadian art while it has nothing to do with "the aroma of sizzling back bacon, Moosehead beer or conceptual art pieces based on Toronto Maple Leaf jerseys"? (Need Citation) The answer lies precisely in its international elements.

Since the 1960s Vancouver's commercial galleries' (close contact with the US art industry constructs a binary framework of North America Art vs Other arts. Wall, the emerging artist of that time, appeals to the public as a North American rather than a Canadian artist. The public tends to empathize with the "borderless art" concept between the states and Canada (Global and Mail). In the eye of many people outside North America, Vancouver was often labelled as a west coast backwater. However, the Canadianness of Wall's work was more related to its historical significance rather than an apparent aesthetic distinction.

Since the late 1800s, Vancouver has served as a transportation gateway trade across the Pacific. British Columbia mainly exported natural resources such as gold, coal and salmon. In the Gold Rush of 1858, hundreds of Asian miners joined the gold-seekers heading to British Columbia. Motivated by many factors, Asian immigrants arrived in Vancouver and participated in urban development through both labour and investment. The close contact between different cultures offered Wall a glimpse of traditional Asian art. A Sudden Gust of Wind was created within such a diversified cultural atmosphere.

## **Vancouver Photo School**

In the 20th century, foreign investments, stock exchanges, Expo 86, and expansive urban renewal projects contributed to the transformation of Vancouver, both economically and artistically. The internationalizing city welcomed a group of talented artists and theorists, creating a highly developed intellectual climate. Jeff Wall's photographic practice emerged in this context.

Wall started as a painter at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Though he never finished his Ph.D., Wall read widely on art-related topics and became a member of the Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism. The school began to include artists in Vancouver, such as Wall, around 1990. The school refers to a standard critical sensibility rather than aesthetic similarity or genre. It represents the development of Vancouver Photoconceptualism. The theory prioritizes ideas over traditional aesthetic, technical, and material concerns. Wall's conceptual photograph often utilizes staged composition to illustrate an idea. Thanks to

the group of intellectuals, the term “Vancouver” has become a brand name, representing artistic qualities of conceptualism and post-conceptualism. The work of the Vancouver School launched Vancouver into the international art market. Although Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind* does not exhibit a “regional” aesthetic, its relation to photoconceptualism renders it unmistakably(?) Canadian.

### **Vancouver Art Market**

While Vancouver underwent continuous post-war redevelopment during the 1960s and 70s, there was no mature art market for commercial purposes. “Nobody in Vancouver buys art ... they are not interested in painting,” says Andy Warhol (cite this?). Indeed, the local art market of this hub for trade between Canada and Asia started small. However, as the towering concrete building rises and mixes with the well-balanced magnificent natural surroundings in 1955, the city welcomed the beginning of their commercial gallery, an American couple, Alvin Balkind and Abraham Rogatnick. Interested in Vancouver’s Old British charm, their modern aesthetics drove the couple to open the first commercial gallery in the city, called the New Design Gallery (NDG). While creating marketing for local artists to benefit financially, the New Design Gallery became a meeting place for contemporary art, establishing an “art club” for artists to socialize. The gallery was crucial for popularizing contemporary artistic ideas among knowledgeable audiences and patrons, but its story does not end there.

In 1966, Doug Christmas from West Vancouver took over the gallery after purchasing it and renaming it Douglas Gallery. Christmas was internationally connected. Along with the record gains for the Vancouver stock exchange in the 1960s, Douglas Gallery attracted young artists with idealistic dreams worldwide. The gallery was no longer a local market but an international trading center for art and ideas as it renders Vancouver art with internationality. The aesthetics of the Vancouver art world leans toward the global rather than the local.

Both NDG and Douglas Gallery exhibited primarily contemporary paintings. As a relatively newer art medium, photography did not have a decent collecting tradition in Vancouver. In other words, people did not buy into collecting photos. After the end of Douglas Gallery’s era in the 1970s, NOVA Gallery carried on its legacy and aesthetics, dedicated to exhibiting photography of local artists such as Jeff Wall. With the international atmosphere inherited from its predecessors, NOVA planned to create a new group of photography collectors and patrons. It underwent group exhibitions of local and international photographers to popularize the art medium. The attempt was successful financially and artistically, laying a foundation for the thriving of Canadian photography.

Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind* was a result of the ongoing development of the Canadian art world. Its transcultural theme resembles the diversified culture of Vancouver. Its ideology follows the theory of the Vancouver intellectuals. Its art medium marks the thriving of the Canadian art market and galleries. The photo is the epitome of the history of Vancouver’s internationalization. For this particular reason, the work should be credited as meritorious Canadian art.

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