

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Before his tragic death at age 40, Oscar Cahén fled Nazi Germany, made his name as a celebrated North American magazine illustrator, and co-founded the Canadian abstract art collective Painters Eleven.

The Art Canada Institute announces the publication of its free online art book on Cahén, available in English and French



LEFT: Oscar Cahén, Austin Healey 100 Engine, 1954, oil on cradled Masonite, 91 x 122 cm, private collection **RIGHT:** Portrait of Oscar Cahén in his studio in 1951. Photograph by Page Toles

TORONTO, ON – Oscar Cahén is considered one of Canada’s most influential modern artists, yet his name is little known. For almost 50 years following his death, much of his oeuvre lay in storage and was kept hidden from the world. Now the important new art eBook *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work*, written by Dr. Jaleen Grove, shines the spotlight on this Canadian icon. The book will be released on September 25, 2015.

Born in 1916 to Eugenie and Fritz Max Cahén, a Jewish art historian turned resistance fighter in the years leading up to the Second World War, Oscar Cahén, at twenty-four years old, fled with his family from Dresden to England, where he was detained as a possible German spy. The book follows the family's daring escape from Germany, and Cahén's later journey to Canada on a prison ship along with over two thousand German-Jewish men declared enemy aliens.

Despite the personal adversity he faced, in his adopted home Cahén soon shot to fame, becoming one of the country's top magazine illustrators and abstract painters. As an accomplished illustrator at *Maclean's* and other publications, he moved easily between styles and subject matters, and he used his success to finance his growing interest in abstract painting. *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work* marks the first in-depth analysis of the critical significance of Cahén's art, as Grove deftly traces the artist's story back to his early years spent in Germany, a country which imparted a European flavour to his artistic career.

Cahén's self-directed artworks were a colourful and aggressive characterization both of his bold personality and of his ongoing emotional struggles. Joined by his friends and colleagues, he helped found the acclaimed artist collective Painters Eleven, an avant-garde group that played an instrumental role in broadening the scope of modern art in Canada through the legitimization of abstraction. Before the collective disbanded in 1960, notable members included Jack Bush, Alexandra Luke, Kazuo Nakamura, William Ronald, and Harold Town.

Today researchers still grapple with the loss of Cahén, who died suddenly in a collision with an oncoming truck in 1956, at age 40. Although his promising career was cut short, the artist's legacy is rich: in his brief life he produced over 50 *Maclean's* cover illustrations and by created paintings that became part of every major Canadian museum collection.

Oscar Cahén: Life & Work features many never-before-seen artworks, and presents a fresh interpretation of Cahén's output. The book speaks directly to the artist's pivotal role during a period of progressive transformation in Canadian modern art, when the postwar nation aspired to establish an artistic voice alongside its American and European peers.

To download images from *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work*:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/y4erqsq9p26hdi8/AAAebUoGJGIM7AgcQgy_j6hOa?dl=0

About Dr. Jaleen Grove:

Dr. Jaleen Grove has served as the Scholar-in-Residence at the Cahén Archives in Toronto since 2013. An art historian with a specialization in illustration history, she is assistant editor of the forthcoming book *A History of Illustration* and is an associate editor of the *Journal of Illustration*.

About the Art Canada Institute:

Based at Massey College, University of Toronto, the Art Canada Institute is a non-profit research organization dedicated to Canadian art history, research, education, and promotion.

About the Canadian Online Art Book Project:

The Canadian Online Art Book Project publishes six art eBooks a year, available for free in both French and English, written in an accessible voice by the country's art experts, to promote the study of Canada and its art history to a wide public audience, both domestically and abroad.

For press inquiries or more information about *Oscar Cahén: Life & Work*, please contact:

Sara Angel

sangel@aci-iac.ca

647.801.3729

www.aci-iac.ca



Canadian Art History Research, Education, and Promotion

4 Devonshire Place
Toronto, ON, M5S 2E1

CANADA

info@aci-iac.ca