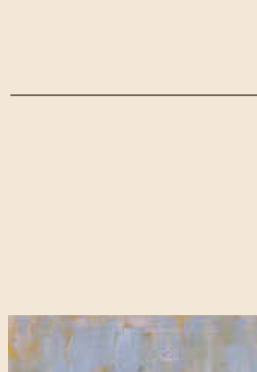


# GO WEST

## CELEBRATING THE WORK OF LIONEL LEMOINE FITZGERALD

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Prairie Sky*, c.1923, National Gallery of Canada

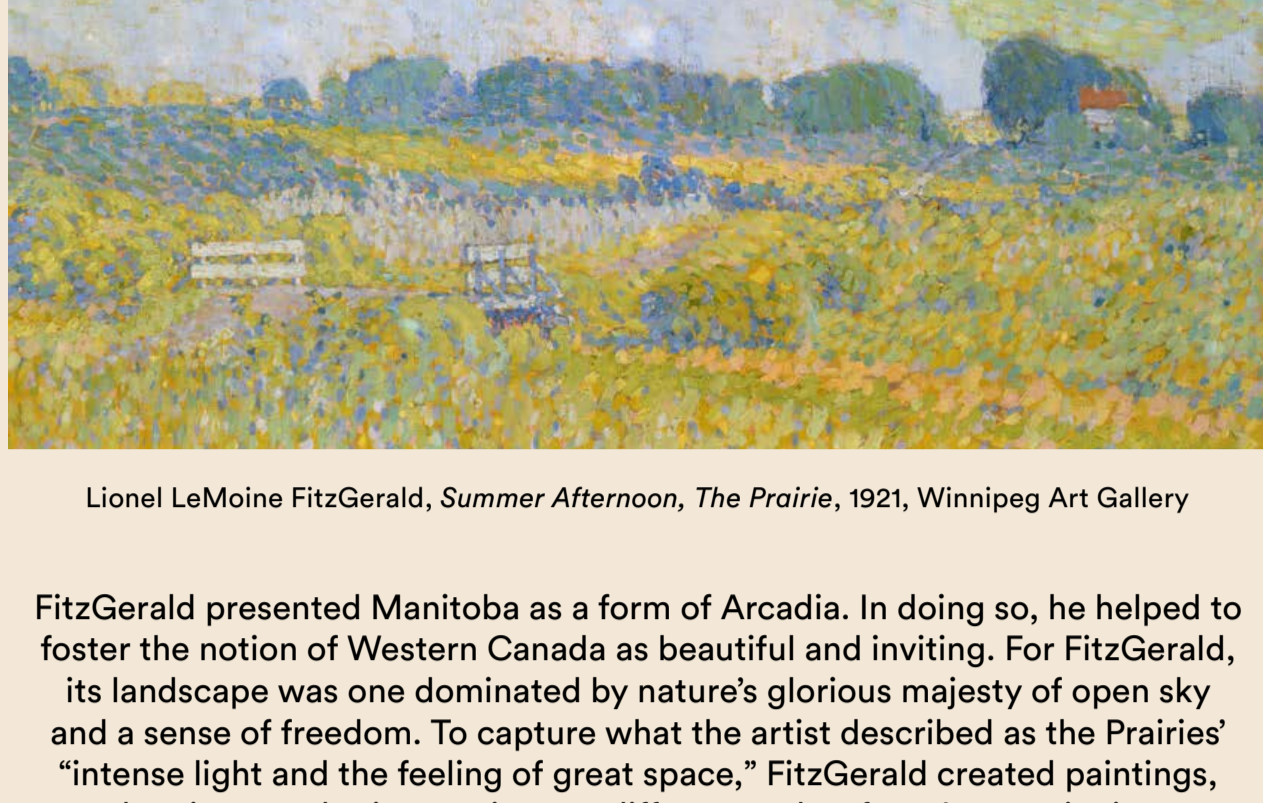
Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald at the age of twenty, 1910, photograph by Krauss Studio



One of the most engaging exhibitions now on view is *Into the Light* at the recently reopened Winnipeg Art Gallery. It spotlights Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald (1890–1956), who is famed as the only Prairies-based artist to be invited into the Group of Seven. If you don't have a chance to make it to Manitoba (or didn't see the show in its first leg this past winter at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Ontario), we're using this newsletter to share what we love about Fitzgerald. Simply put, although his legacy is tied to his being part of the Group of Seven, there's much more that makes him great. As ACI author Michael Parke-Taylor (and co-curator of the WAG exhibition) reveals in his thought-provoking publication *Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald: Life & Work*, excerpted here, Fitzgerald gives us an abundance of reasons to look West.

**Sara Angel**  
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

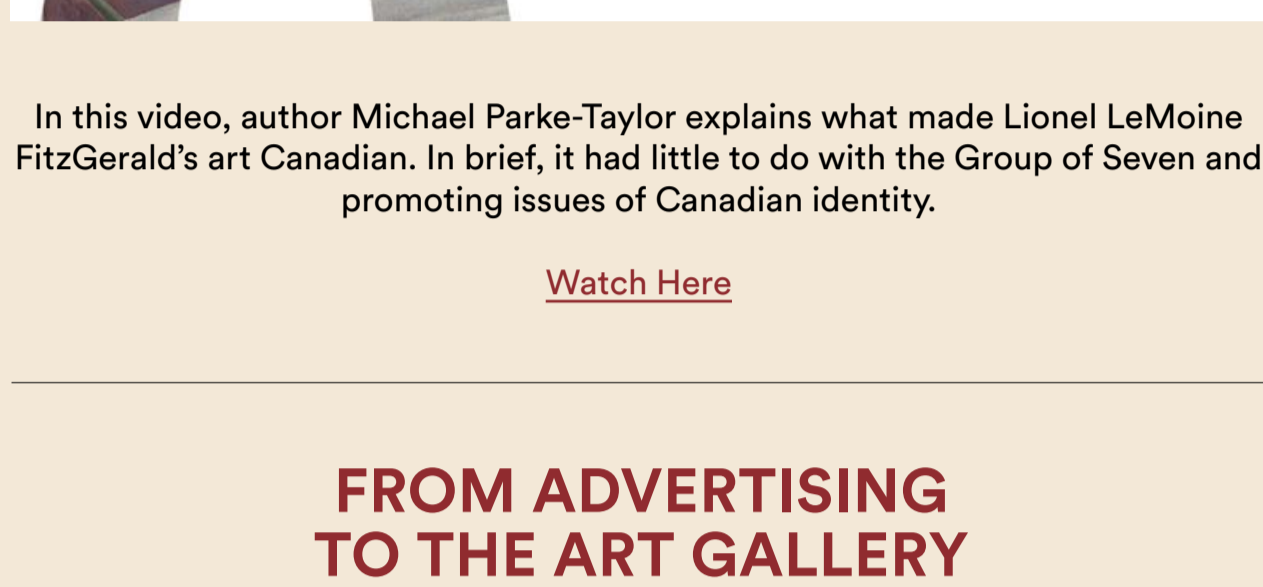
### PRAIRIE PREFERENCE

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Summer Afternoon, The Prairie*, 1921, Winnipeg Art Gallery

Fitzgerald presented Manitoba as a form of Arcadia. In doing so, he helped to foster the notion of Western Canada as beautiful and inviting. For Fitzgerald, its landscape was one dominated by nature's glorious majesty of open sky and a sense of freedom. To capture what the artist described as the Prairies' "intense light and the feeling of great space," Fitzgerald created paintings, drawings, and prints, trying out different styles, from Impressionism (as shown here) to abstraction, to capture the essence of his province's topography and unique light.

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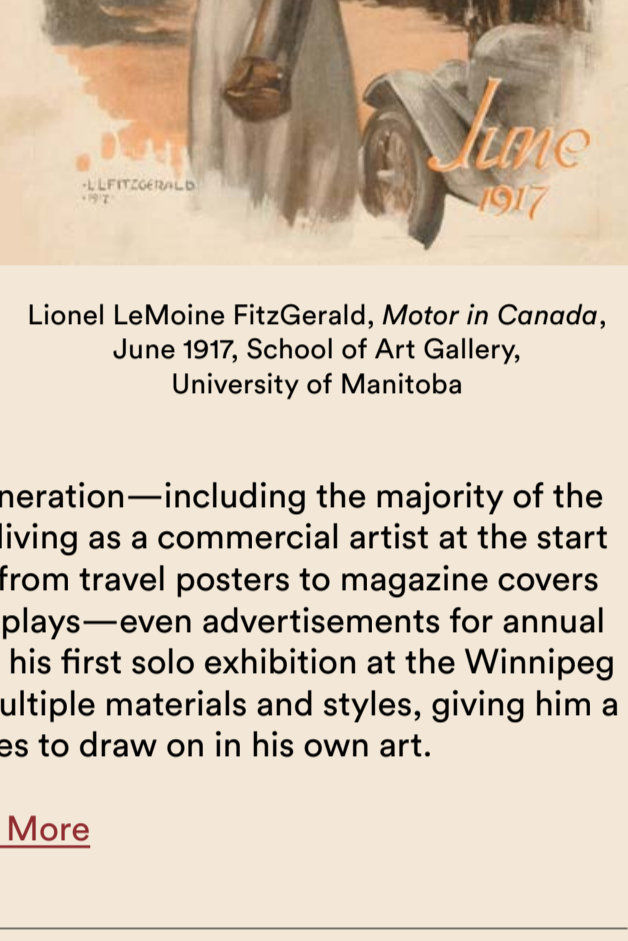
### A MAN OF HIS OWN



In this video, author Michael Parke-Taylor explains what made Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald's art Canadian. In brief, it had little to do with the Group of Seven and promoting issues of Canadian identity.

[Watch Here](#)

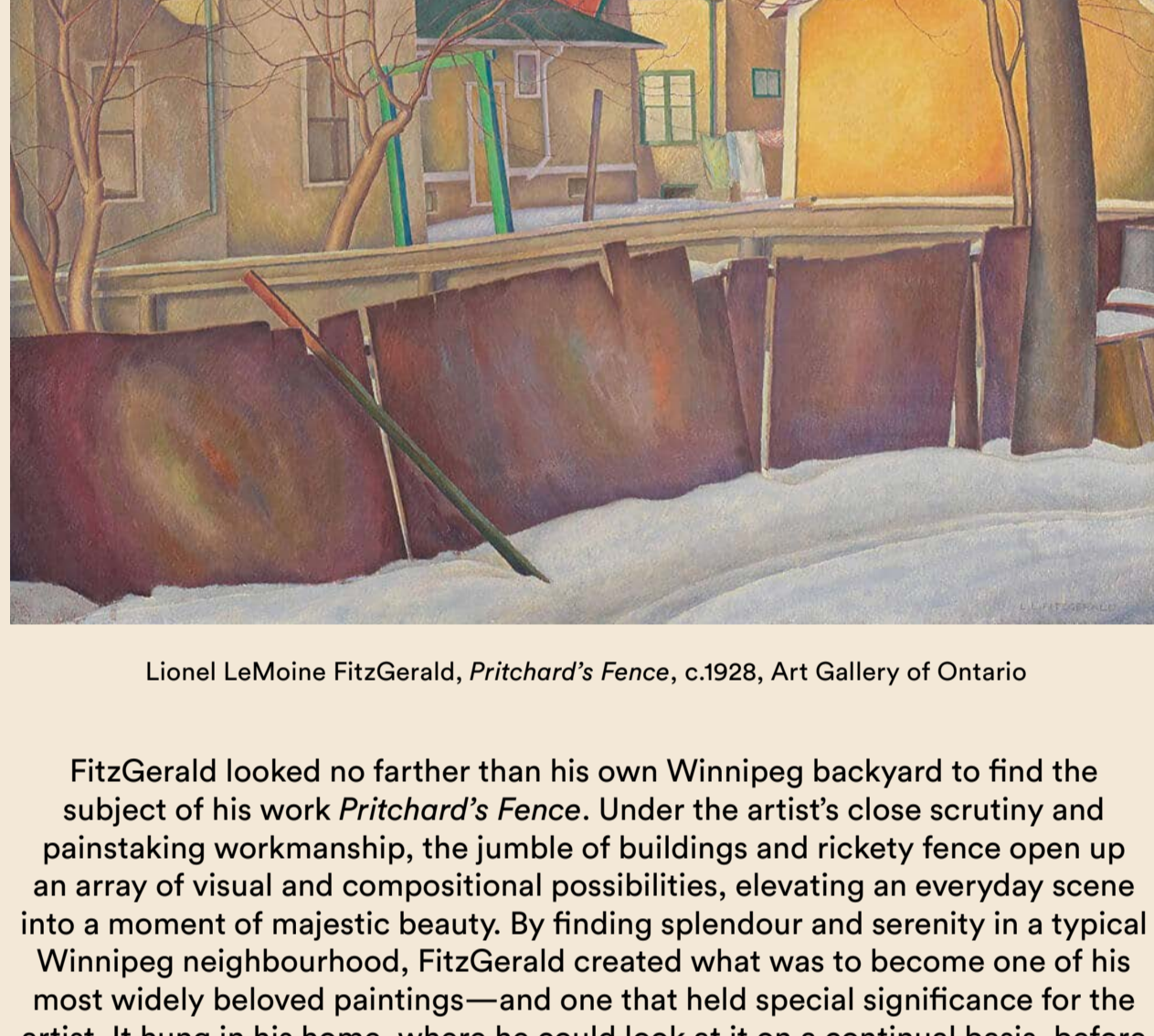
### FROM ADVERTISING TO THE ART GALLERY

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Shooting the Rapids*, c.1915, School of Art Gallery, University of ManitobaLionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Motor in Canada*, June 1917, School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba

Like many Canadian painters of his generation—including the majority of the Group of Seven—Fitzgerald earned a living as a commercial artist at the start of his career. He designed everything from travel posters to magazine covers and stage scenery to shop-window displays—even advertisements for annual Christmas parades. By 1921, the year of his first solo exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Fitzgerald had mastered multiple materials and styles, giving him a virtuosic range of techniques to draw on in his own art.

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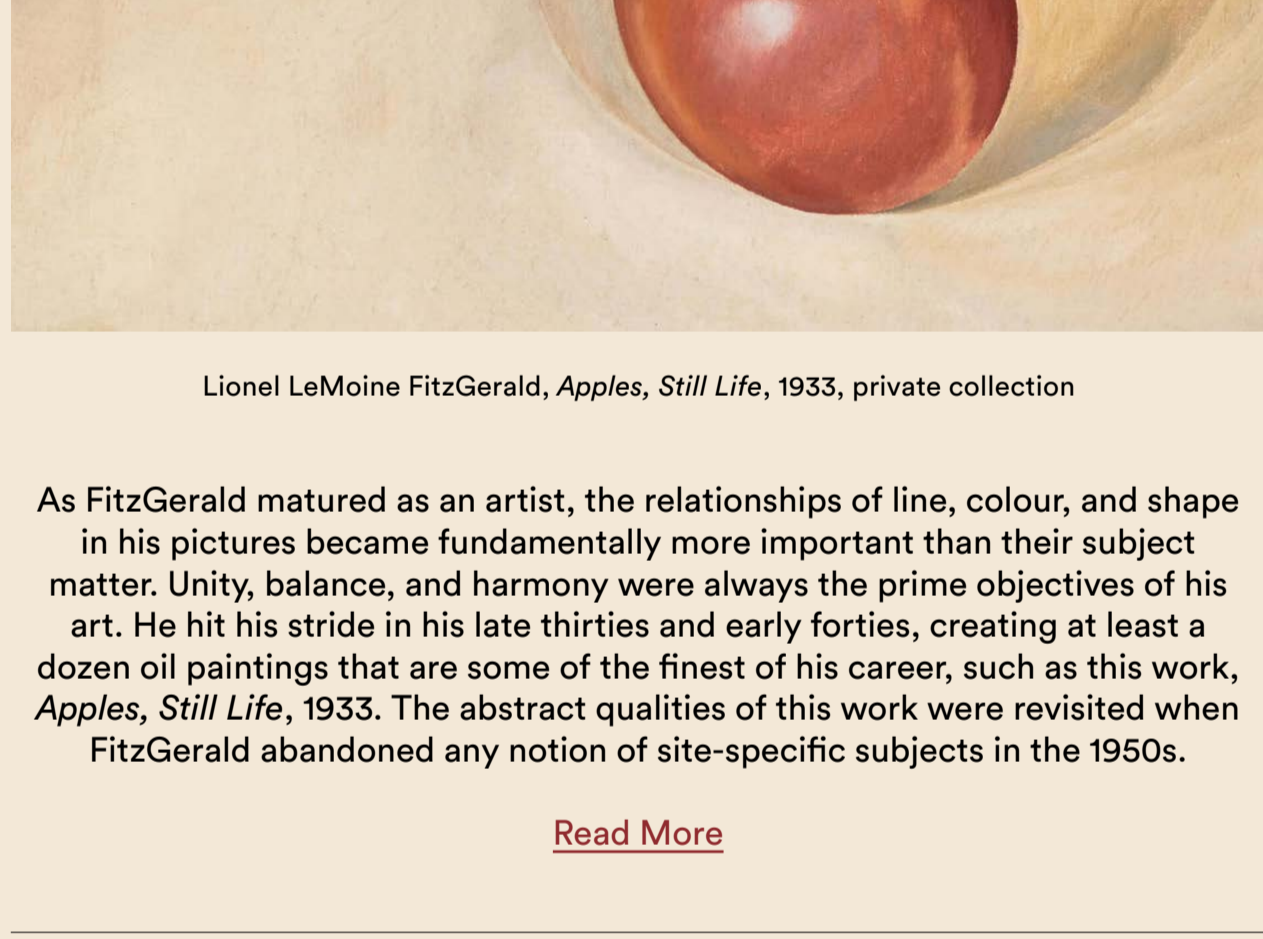
### TRANSFORMER OF THE ORDINARY INTO THE EXTRAORDINARY

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Pritchard's Fence*, c.1928, Art Gallery of Ontario

Fitzgerald looked no farther than his own Winnipeg backyard to find the subject of his work *Pritchard's Fence*. Under the artist's close scrutiny and painstaking workmanship, the jumble of buildings and rickety fence open up an array of visual and compositional possibilities, elevating an everyday scene into a moment of majestic beauty. By finding splendour and serenity in a typical Winnipeg neighbourhood, Fitzgerald created what was to become one of his most widely beloved paintings—and one that held special significance for the artist. It hung in his home, where he could look at it on a continual basis, before the painting was acquired by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1951.

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### STILL LIFE MASTER

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Apples, Still Life*, 1933, private collection

As Fitzgerald matured as an artist, the relationships of line, colour, and shape in his pictures became fundamentally more important than their subject matter. Unity, balance, and harmony were always the prime objectives of his art. He hit his stride in his late thirties and early forties, creating at least a dozen oil paintings that are some of the finest of his career, such as this work, *Apples, Still Life*, 1933. The abstract qualities of this work were revisited when Fitzgerald abandoned any notion of site-specific subjects in the 1950s.

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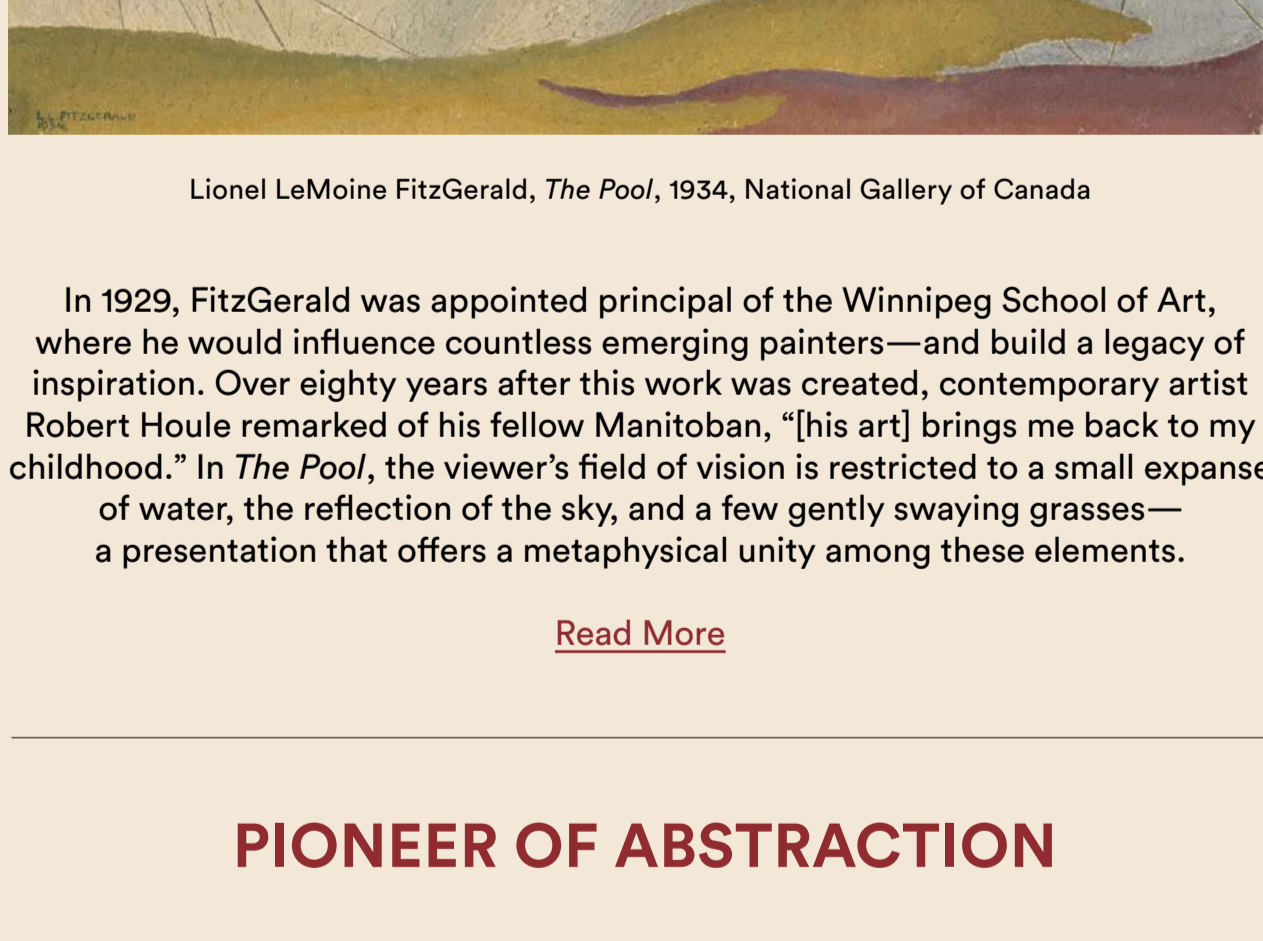
### A DIFFERENT VISION

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Broken Tree in Landscape*, 1931, Winnipeg Art Gallery

By the early 1930s, Fitzgerald's painting was attracting attention across the country. In 1932, the Group of Seven asked the artist to be part of their association, although his paintings, like this work, looked little like theirs. The following year, this new affiliation led Fitzgerald to become a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters (an evolution of the Group of Seven). *Broken Tree in Landscape* was his contribution to its inaugural exhibition, showing art intended to challenge audiences and transform the country's visual culture.

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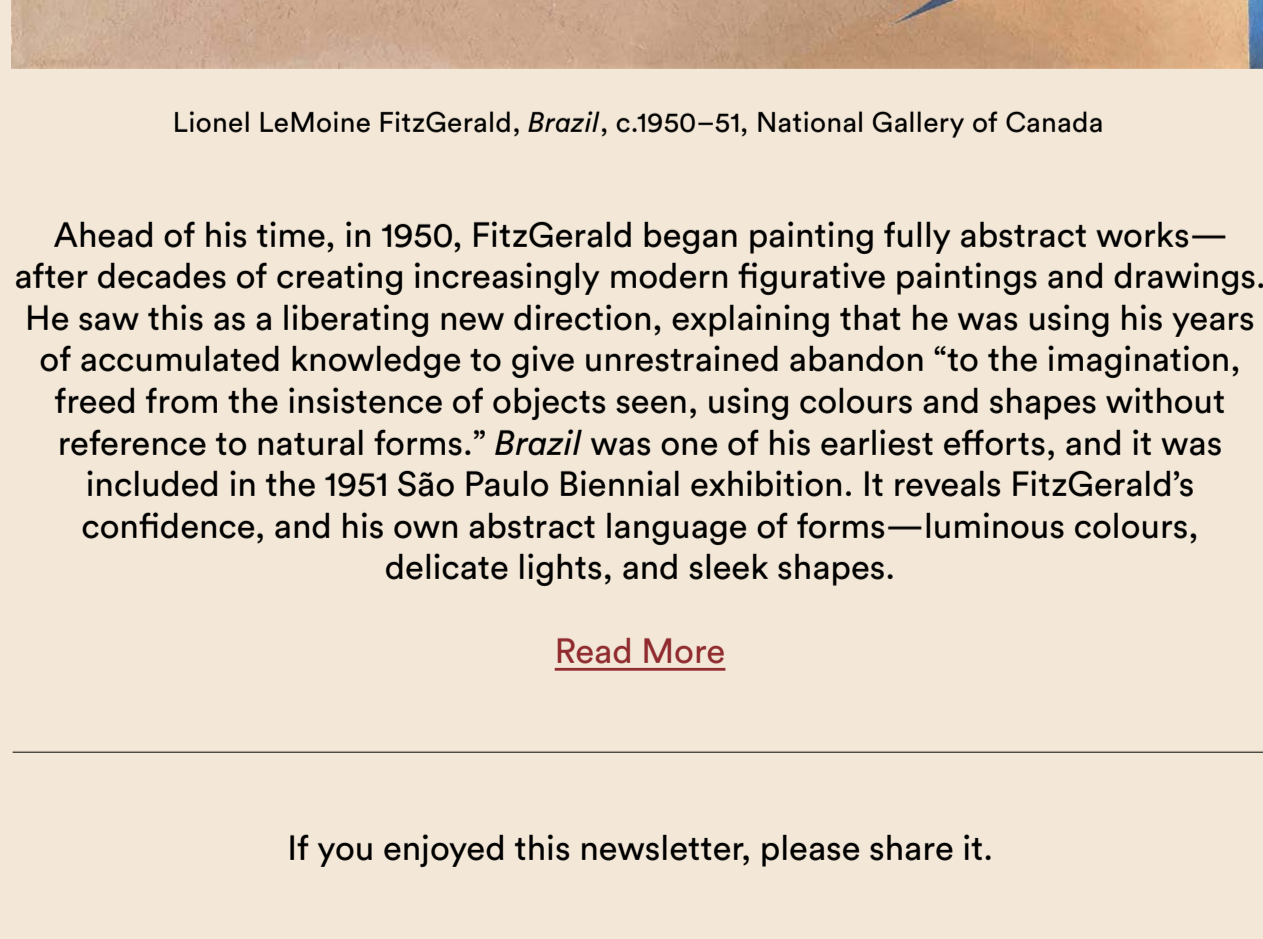
### A LEGACY OF INSPIRATION

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *The Pool*, 1934, National Gallery of Canada

In 1929, Fitzgerald was appointed principal of the Winnipeg School of Art, where he would influence countless emerging painters—and build a legacy of inspiration. Over eighty years after this work was created, contemporary artist Robert Houle remarked of his fellow Manitoban, "[his art] brings me back to my childhood." In *The Pool*, the viewer's field of vision is restricted to a small expanse of water, the reflection of the sky, and a few gently swaying grasses—a presentation that offers a metaphysical unity among these elements.

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### PIONEER OF ABSTRACTION

Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald, *Brazil*, c.1950–51, National Gallery of Canada

Ahead of his time, in 1950, Fitzgerald began painting fully abstract works—after decades of creating increasingly modern figurative paintings and drawings. He saw this as a liberating new direction, explaining that he was using his years of accumulated knowledge to give unrestrained abandon "to the imagination, freed from the insistence of objects seen, using colours and shapes without reference to natural forms." *Brazil* was one of his earliest efforts, and it was included in the 1951 São Paulo Biennial exhibition. It reveals Fitzgerald's confidence, and his own abstract language of forms—luminous colours, delicate lights, and sleek shapes.

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