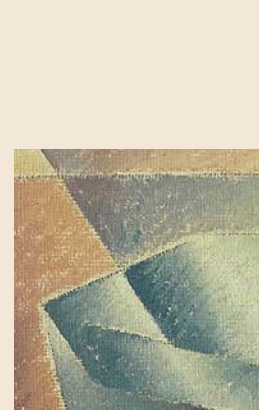
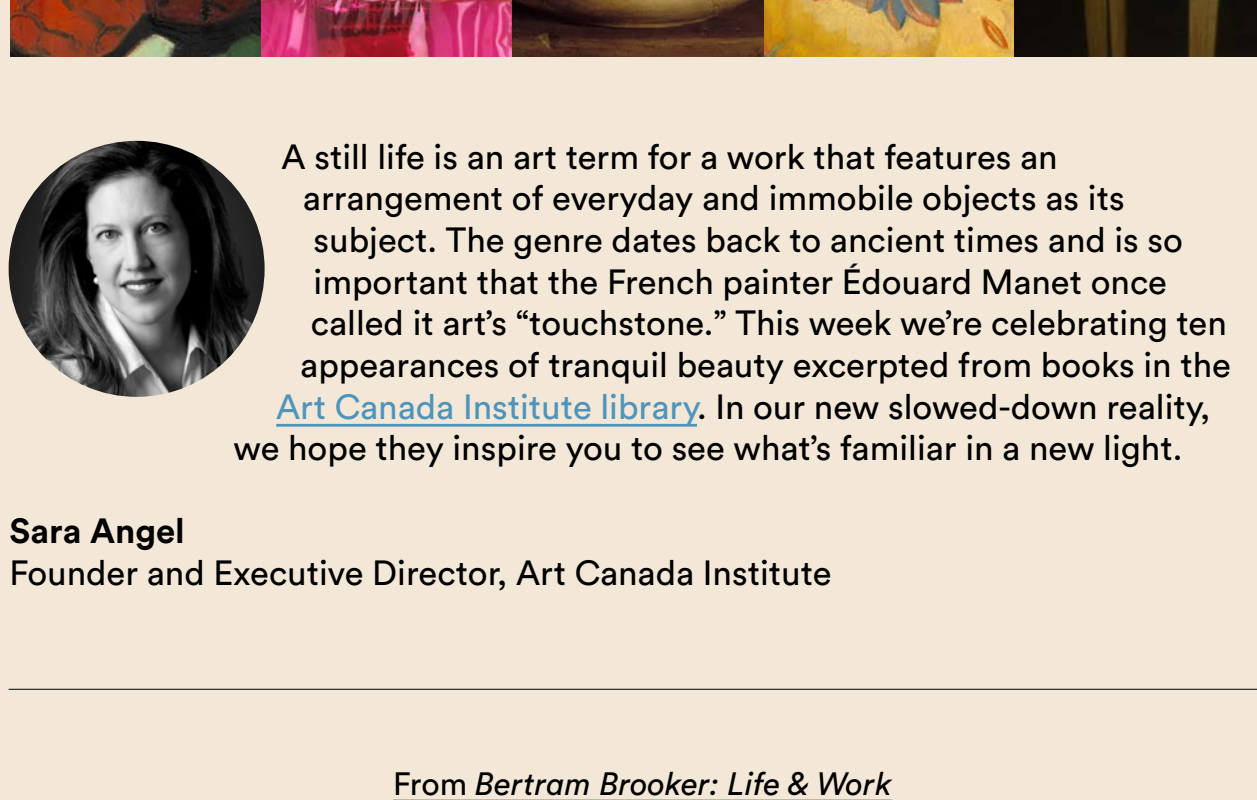


TRANQUIL BEAUTY 10 CANADIAN STILL LIVES

See the Familiar in a New Light



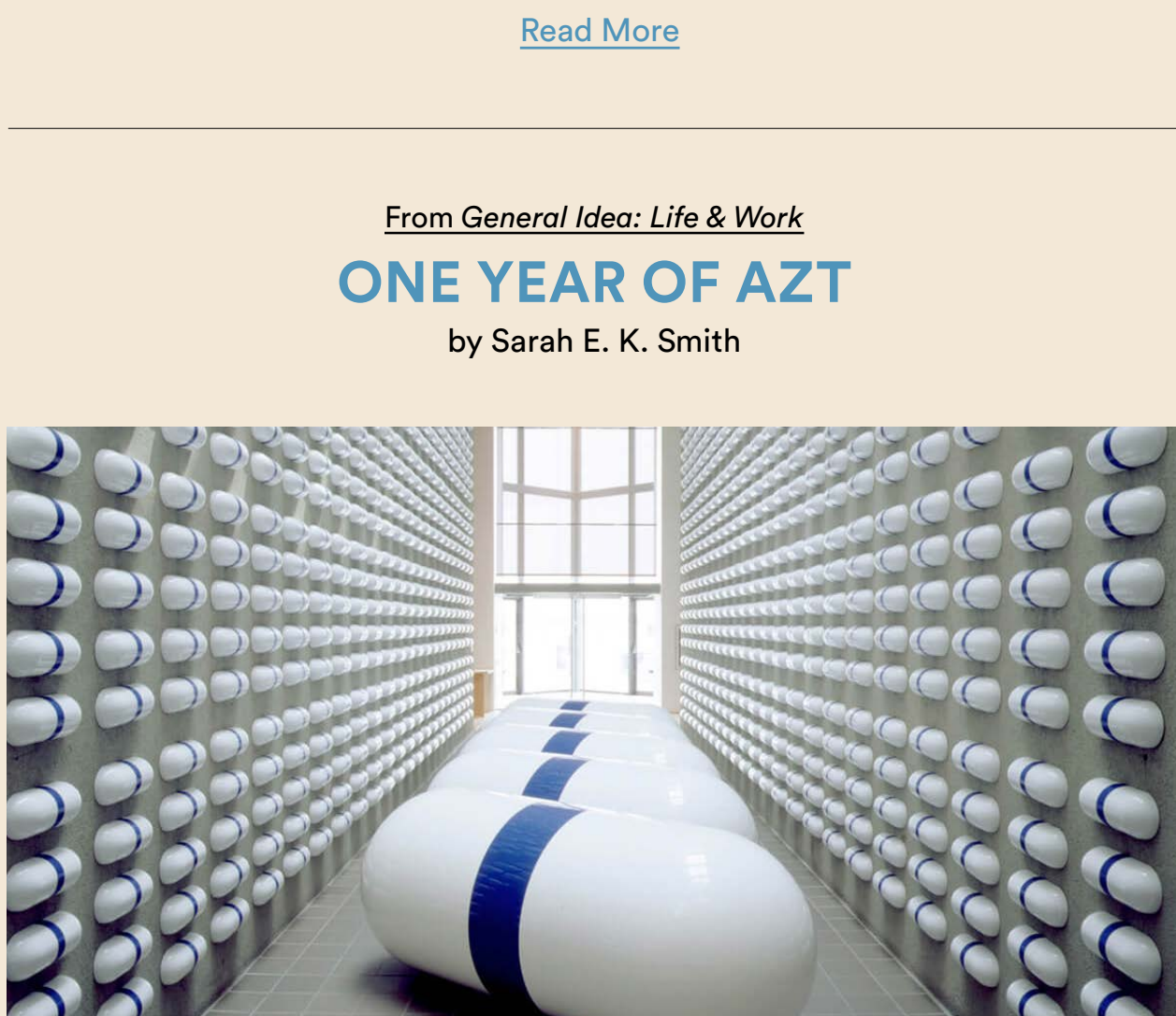
A still life is an art term for a work that features an arrangement of everyday and immobile objects as its subject. The genre dates back to ancient times and is so important that the French painter Édouard Manet once called it art's "touchstone." This week we're celebrating ten appearances of tranquil beauty excerpted from books in the [Art Canada Institute library](#). In our new slowed-down reality, we hope they inspire you to see what's familiar in a new light.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

From Bertram Brooker: Life & Work

STILL LIFE WITH LEMONS

by James King



Bertram Brooker, *Still Life with Lemons*, c.1936

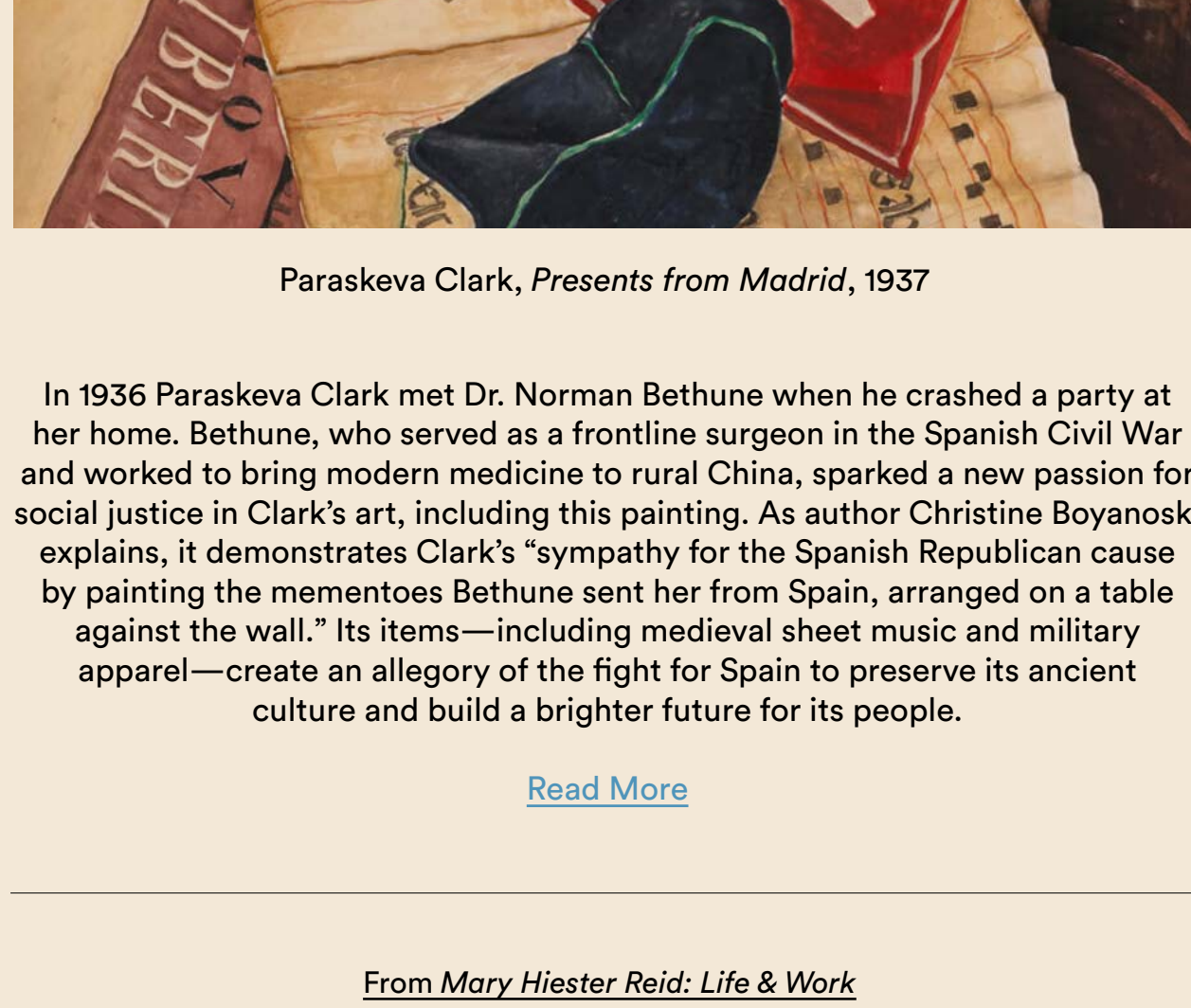
As an early advocate for abstract art, Bertram Brooker was one of the most innovative painters of the 1930s. *Still Life with Lemons* reveals why. Here Brooker presents two lemons, a squash, and a dining table cloth that have an almost palpable texture. Yet the work's bowl, its shadow, and background are rendered with precise abstract lines that lift from reality the other everyday elements in the painting. Confronted with a masterful blend of representational and abstract modes, the viewer is forced to question where, precisely, is the line between the material and the immaterial?

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From General Idea: Life & Work

ONE YEAR OF AZT

by Sarah E. K. Smith



General Idea, *One Year of AZT*, 1991

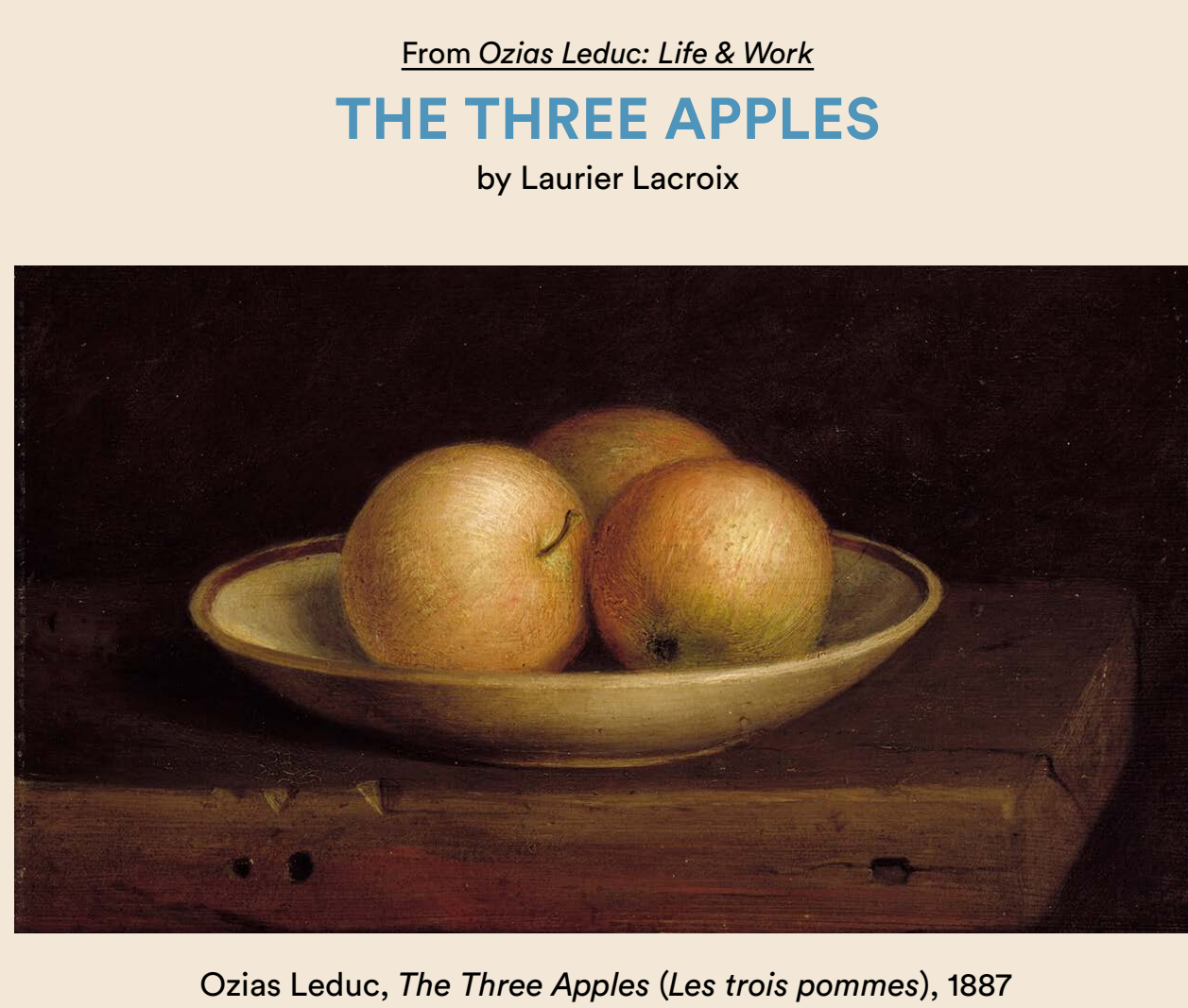
In the early 1980s, the art group General Idea (made up of the trio AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge Zontal) created art to advocate for AIDS awareness. Orderly and stark, the oversized installation *One Year of AZT* presents the viewer with a terrible, chilling beauty. Like many still lifes, it was inspired by objects the artists lived with—in this case the antiretroviral medicine AZT (azidothymidine), a medication that Partz took for HIV treatment. The installation is comprised of 1,825 pills, the exact amount of Partz's annual dosage. As his collaborator AA Bronson explained, "Our life was full of pills, our apartment was full of pills ... so they became part of our work."

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From Paraskeva Clark: Life & Work

PRESENTS FROM MADRID

by Christine Boyanoski



Paraskeva Clark, *Presents from Madrid*, 1937

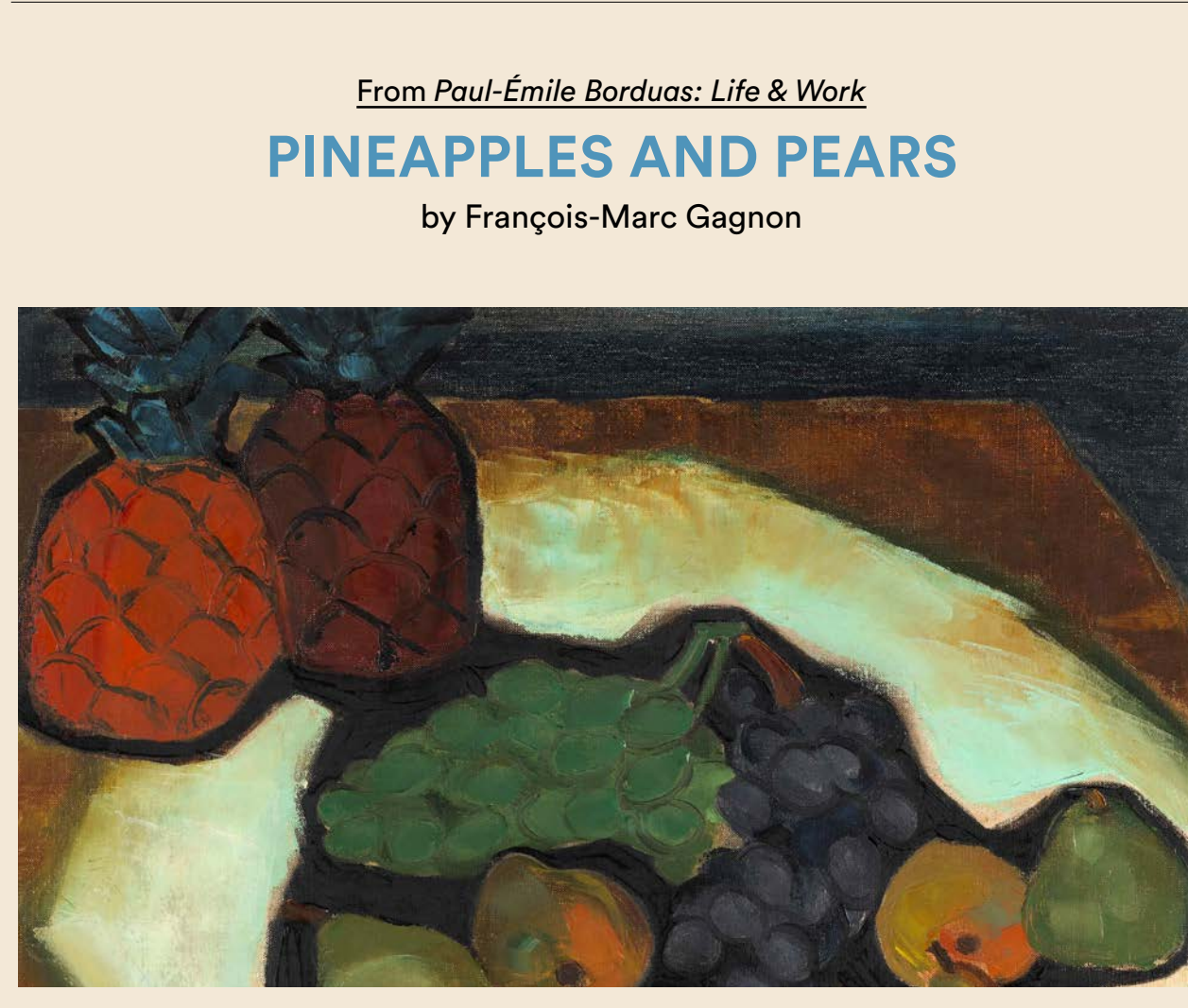
In 1936 Paraskeva Clark met Dr. Norman Bethune when he crashed a party at her home. Bethune, who served as a frontline surgeon in the Spanish Civil War and worked to bring modern medicine to rural China, sparked a new passion for social justice in Clark's art, including this painting. As author Christine Boyanoski explains, it demonstrates Clark's "sympathy for the Spanish Republican cause by painting the mementoes Bethune sent her from Spain, arranged on a table against the wall." Its items—including medieval shawl music and military apparel—create an allegory of the fight for Spain to preserve its ancient culture and build a brighter future for its people.

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From Mary Hiester Reid: Life & Work

A STUDY IN GREYS

by Andrea Terry



Mary Hiester Reid, *A Study in Greys*, c.1913

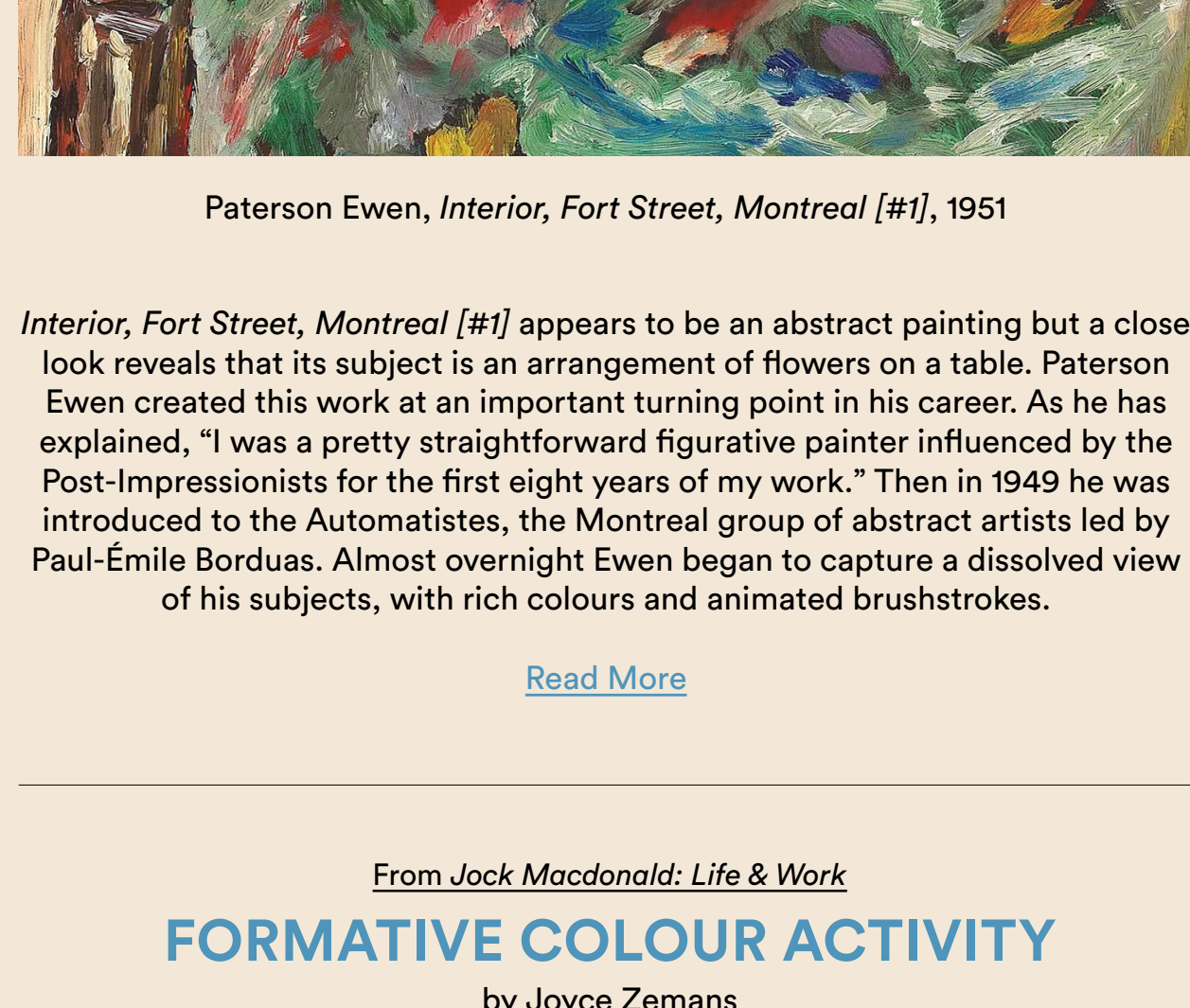
In the 1600s a craze for flower paintings emerged in the Netherlands, catapulting the genre into a highly esteemed realm and establishing the term "still life" (derived from the Dutch word *stilleven*). In early-twentieth-century Canada Mary Hiester Reid furthered this tradition so well that in 1922 she became the first woman to receive her own retrospective exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario). Although Hiester Reid painted other subjects she was most lauded for her artful depictions of flowers, and *A Study in Greys* was considered her masterpiece: it showcases her skill in combining tonal gradations of colour through a delicate image of roses.

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From Ozias Leduc: Life & Work

THE THREE APPLES

by Laurier Lacroix



Ozias Leduc, *The Three Apples (Les trois pommes)*, 1887

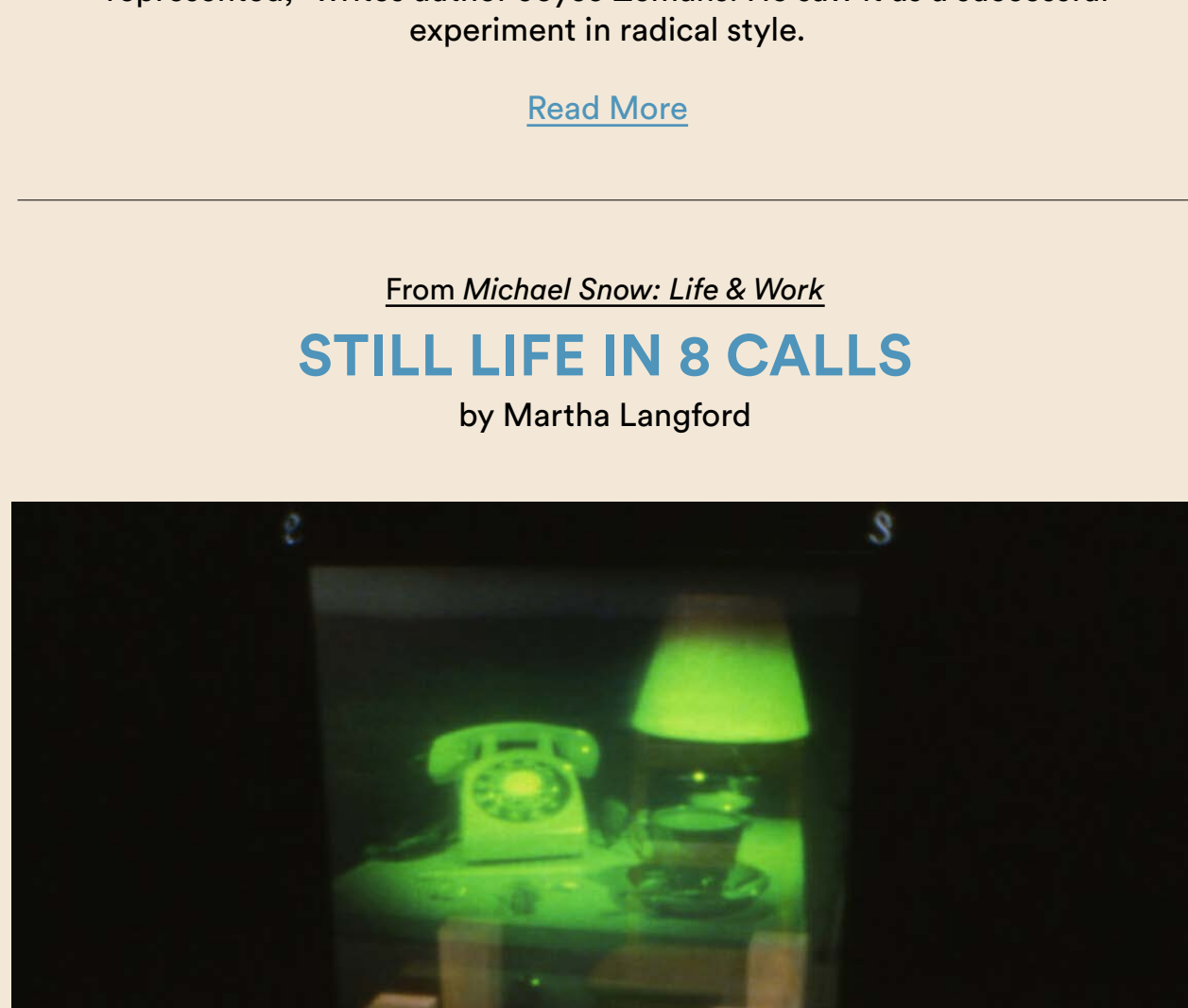
At the age of twenty-three the famed Quebec painter Ozias Leduc created this mesmerizing depiction of three apples arranged in a shallow bowl on a wooden table with a damaged edge. "A subject so simple," writes Laurier Lacroix, "that it evokes an entire universe." The three spheres haloed by the circle of the bowl allude to the Christian Trinity. The space occupied by the apples is bathed in a magical light that both emanates from them and is absorbed by them, while the surroundings and background remain dark.

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From Joyce Wieland: Life & Work

STUFFED MOVIE

by Johanne Sloan



Joyce Wieland, *Stuffed Movie*, 1966

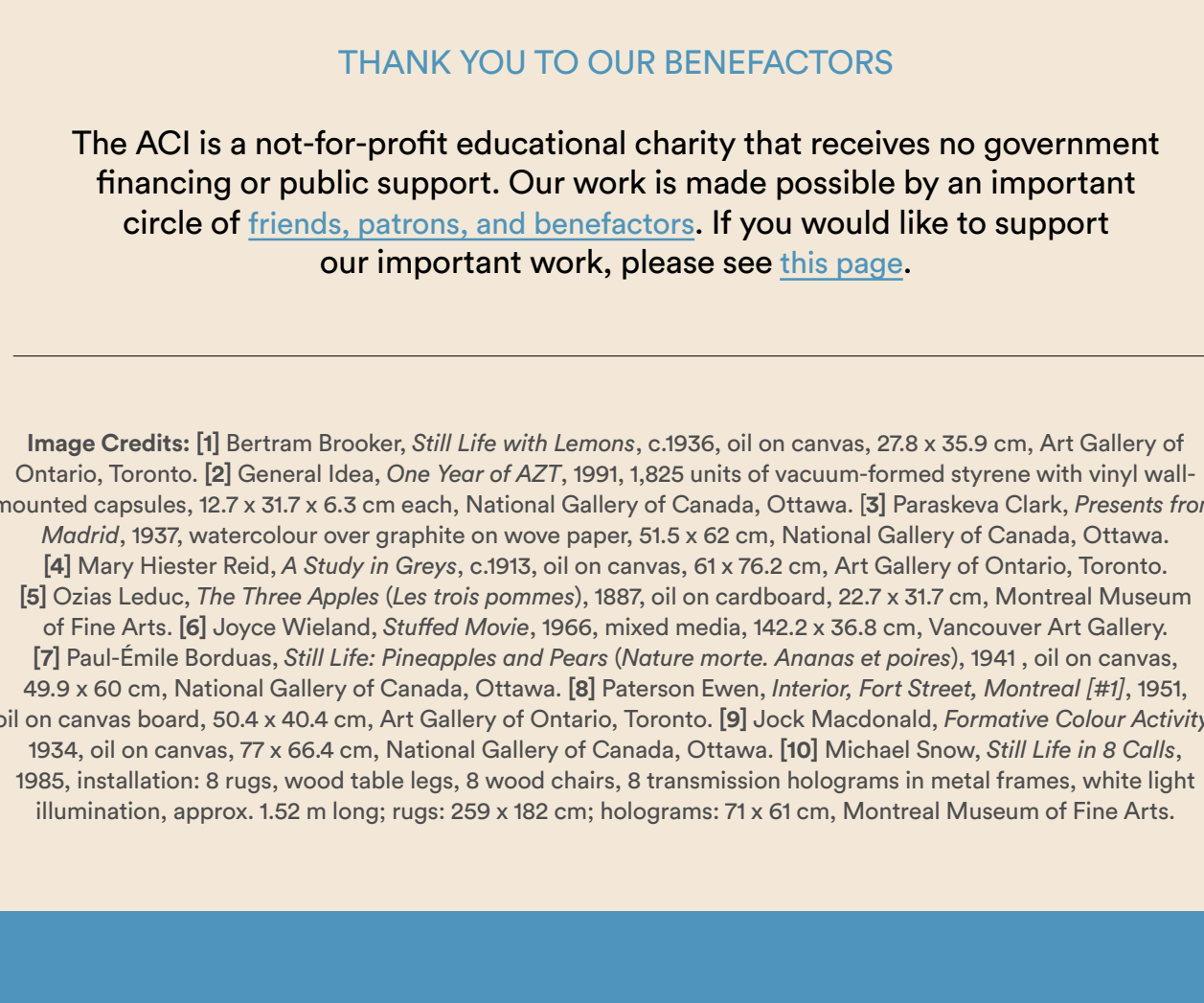
Joyce Wieland, who in 1971 was the first living female artist to have a retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada, constantly challenged audiences' understanding of art throughout her career. With *Stuffed Movie* she created a bright sculptural wall assemblage of transparent plastics that hold diverse everyday objects—ranging from snapshots and mementos to newspaper clippings about the Vietnam War—that echoes the glossy, translucent quality of traditional still life painting but imbues a deft Pop-Art sensibility.

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From Paul-Émile Borduas: Life & Work

PINEAPPLES AND PEARS

by François-Marc Gagnon



Paul-Émile Borduas, *Still Life: Pineapples and Pears (Nature morte. Ananas et poires)*, 1941

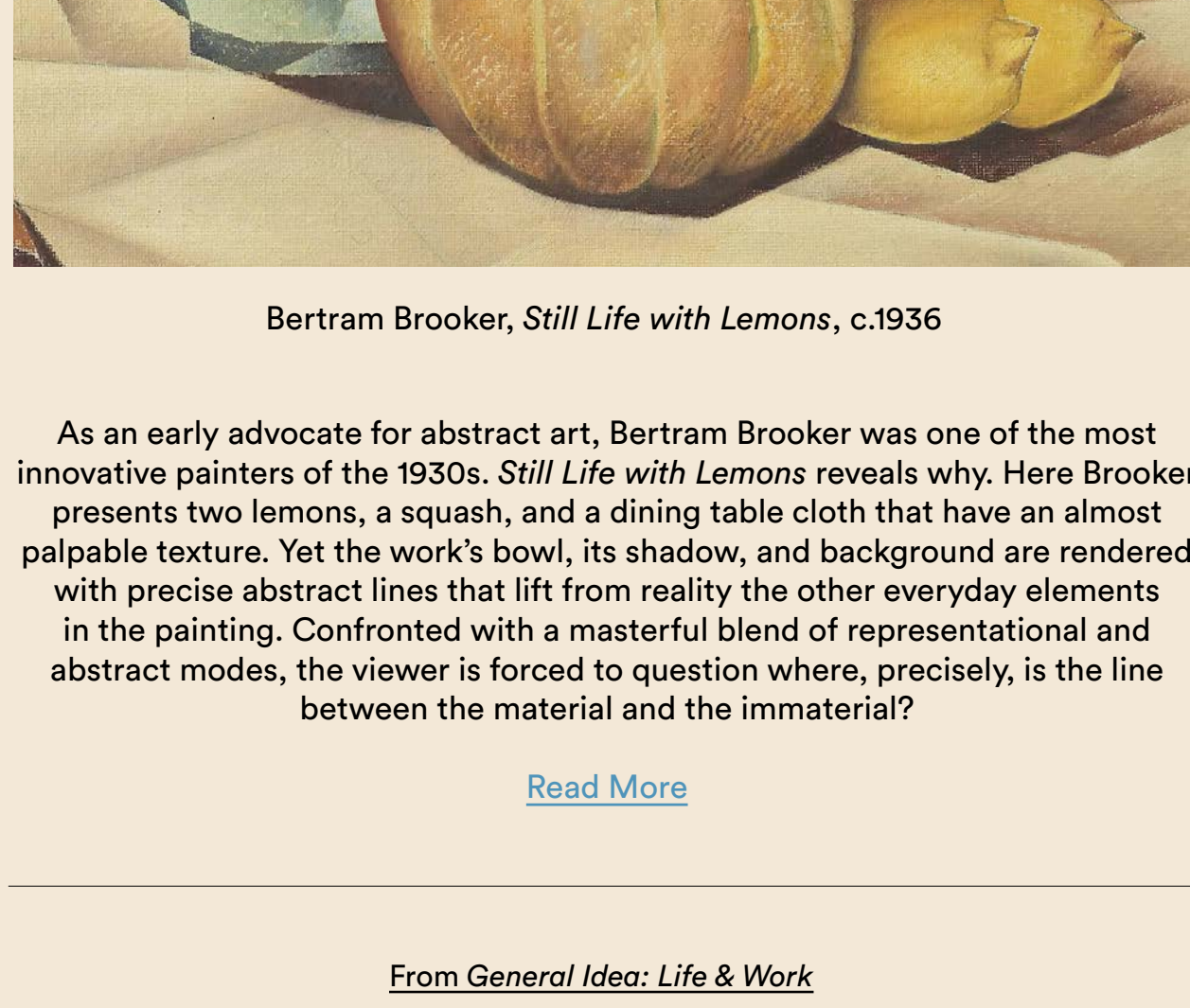
Paul-Émile Borduas was a student of Ozias Leduc, and in this work we see him experimenting with the tradition of painting fruit in still lifes, just as his teacher had when he was a young artist. But Borduas's interpretation is radical. As author François-Marc Gagnon states, not only did Borduas select the exotic pineapple rather than apples but also he offers "not even a remote hint of *trompe l'oeil*"—or any sort of effort to convey his subject realistically. This independent spirit foreshadows how Borduas would soon become the leader of the avant-garde Automatiste movement which produced a lasting influence on Quebec politics and was later credited with anticipating the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s.

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From Paterson Ewen: Life & Work

INTERIOR, FORT STREET, MONTREAL [#1]

by John G. Hatch



Paterson Ewen, *Interior, Fort Street, Montreal [#1]*, 1951

Interior, Fort Street, Montreal [#1] appears to be an abstract painting but a close look reveals that its subject is an arrangement of flowers on a table. Paterson Ewen created this work at an important turning point in his career. As he has explained, "I was a pretty straightforward figurative painter influenced by the Post-Impressionists for the first eight years of my work." Then in 1949 he was introduced to the Automatistes, the Montreal group of abstract artists led by Paul-Émile Borduas. Almost overnight Ewen began to capture a dissolved view of his subjects, with rich colours and animated brushstrokes.

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From Jock Macdonald: Life & Work

FORMATIVE COLOUR ACTIVITY

by Joyce Zemans



Jock Macdonald, *Formative Colour Activity*, 1934

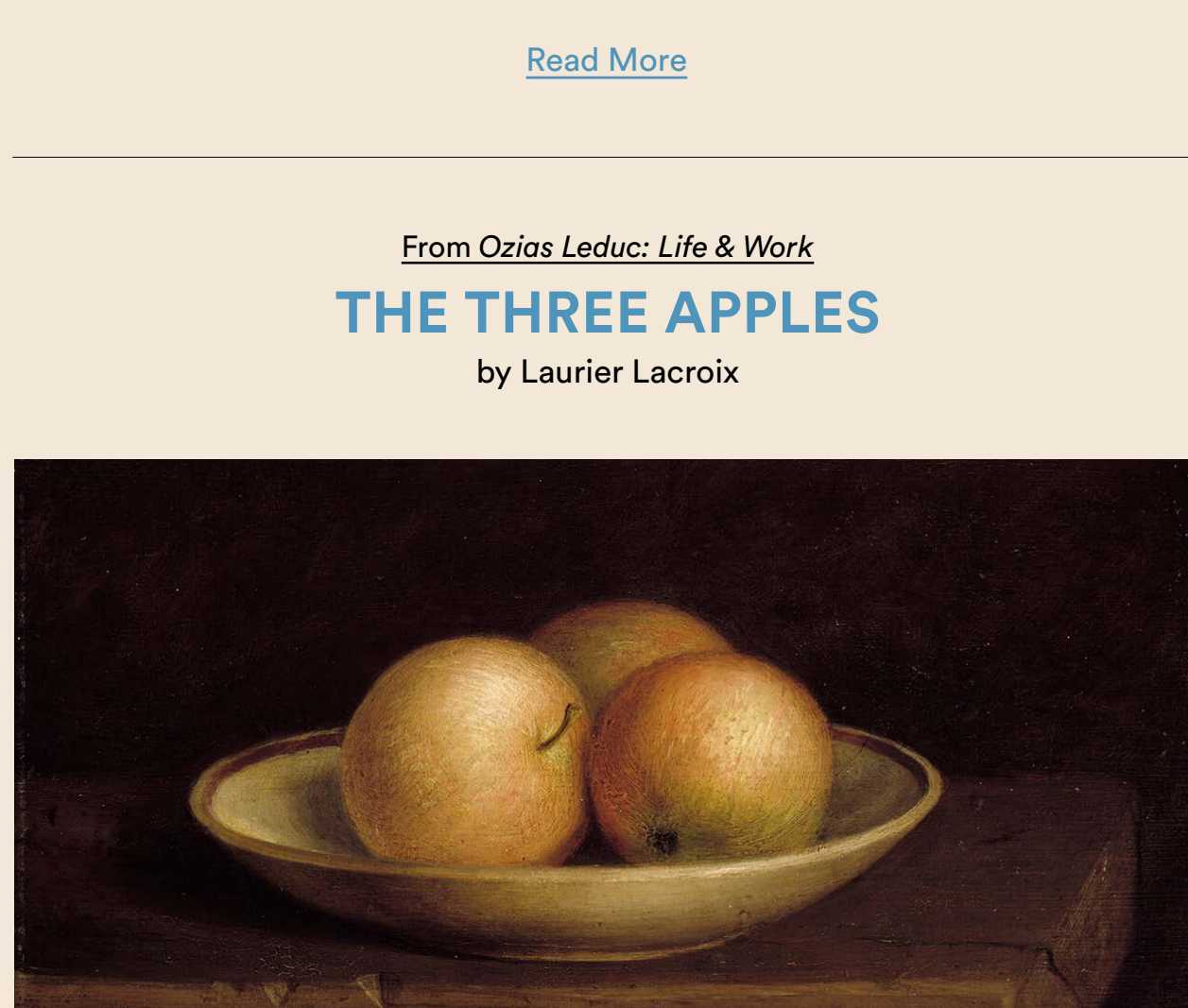
The title of this work reveals how Jock Macdonald, the first painter to exhibit abstract art in Vancouver, approached his still life subject—as an opportunity to experiment with form and colour. In *Formative Colour Activity* a flower stands on a sturdy stalk at the left. The rest of the painting, however, is composed of fields of colour, radiating outward and filling the canvas with waves of flowing and dynamic movement. The painter "was thrilled with the breakthrough it represented," writes author Joyce Zemans. He saw it as a successful experiment in radical style.

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From Michael Snow: Life & Work

STILL LIFE IN 8 CALLS

by Martha Langford



Michael Snow, *Still Life in 8 Calls*, 1985

A playful, inventive take on the still life tradition, *Still Life in 8 Calls* presents quotidian items through a hologram, a medium that Michael Snow embraced in the mid-1980s. The viewer is shown ordinary things—specifically a lamp, a rotary dial telephone, a cup and saucer, a spoon, a pencil, keys, and eyeglasses. While the audience watches, the objects fly into the air and self-destruct in the hologram, making this still life a short-lived experience and a reminder of the ephemeral beauty of the everyday.

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We hope that you liked this selection of works illustrating the extraordinary range of still lifes in Canadian art. If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it.

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Image Credits: [1] Bertram Brooker, *Still Life with Lemons*, c.1936, oil on canvas, 27.8 x 35.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. [2] General Idea, *One Year of AZT*, 1991, 1,825 units of vacuum-formed styrene with vinyl wall-mounted capsules, 12.7 x 31.7 x 3.3 cm each, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [3] Paraskeva Clark, *Presents from Madrid*, 1937, watercolour over graphite on wove paper, 51.5 x 62 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [4] Mary Hiester Reid, *A Study in Greys*, c.1913, oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. [5] Ozias Leduc, *The Three Apples (Les trois pommes)*, 1887, oil on cardboard, 22.7 x 31.7 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. [6] Joyce Wieland, *Stuffed Movie*, 1966, mixed media, 142.2 x 36.8 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery. [7] Paul-Émile Borduas, *Still Life: Pineapples and Pears (Nature morte. Ananas et poires)*, 1941, oil on canvas, 49.9 x 60 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [8] Paterson Ewen, *Interior, Fort Street, Montreal [#1]*, 1951, oil on canvas board, 50.4 x 40.4 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. [9] Jock Macdonald, *Formative Colour Activity*, 1934, oil on canvas, 77 x 66.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [10] Michael Snow, *Still Life in 8 Calls*, 1985, installation: 8 rugs, wood table legs, 8 wood chairs, 8 transmission holograms in metal frames, white light illumination, approx. 1.52 m long; rugs: 259 x 182 cm; holograms: 71 x 61 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.